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The Narrative Delusion
Strategic Scripts and Violent Islamism in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen

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The Narrative Delusion:
Strategic Scripts and Violent Islamism in Egypt, Saudi
Arabia and Yemen

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A dissertation presented to the Department of War Studies,
King's College London in fulfilment of a PhD in War Studies

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Terror, counter-terror, violence, counter-violence: that is what observers bitterly record when they describe the circle of hate.

Frantz Fanon
The Wretched of the Earth

Abstract

This PhD explores the strategic decision-making processes of violent Islamist movements in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The primary aim of this research is to investigate how these organisations formulate and select strategy. The research constructs an interdisciplinary approach to decision-making based on strategic scripts, which are viewed as cognitive structures that allow strategists to form expectations about how a sequence of events might unfold, enabling a potentially successful course of action to be selected. The research argues that there are a limited number of scripts available to violent Islamists: survival, power play, mobilisation, provocation, de-legitimisation, attrition, co-operation and de-mobilisation.

The case study chapters are devoted to establishing the existence and nature of the eight scripts and to investigating how they unfold when operationalised, focusing on the interplay between terrorist action and government counter-terrorism reaction. The major conclusion is that while scripts govern decision-making by fostering expectations about the outcome of strategic options, there is a pervasive disparity between the way in which scripts, as theoretical visions, *should* unfold and the way in which strategies *actually* unfold. The final chapter argues that this disparity is a consequence of 'narrative delusion'. It argues that strategic scripts are not simply cognitive structures, but also stories about the future, describing how situations evolve and conclude. The problem for strategists is that even credible stories can mislead by smothering the role played by luck, shortening the distance between cause and effect or oversimplifying the impact of human agency. But because scripts are persuasive stories, violent Islamists often remain blind to their inherent fallacies. The research concludes by arguing that, for the violent Islamists under study, narrative fallacies very often render scripts inadequate as well as making some more general observations about strategic decision-making outside the world of violent Islamism.

Chapter 1

Strategic Scripts and Terrorist Decision-Making

al-Qa'ida is a unique terrorist entity. With its global aims and significant resources, its flat, nebulous structures, its predilection for new technologies and its often indiscriminate attacks, it is a new type of terrorist threat. That, at any rate, is one analysis which has long held – and continues to hold – the field of Terrorism Studies in thrall.¹ Jason Burke, for example, a veteran reporter on the subject of al-Qa'ida, wrote that 'the threat that faces us is new and different, complex and diverse, dynamic and protean and profoundly difficult to characterize', adding that 'currently there is no vocabulary with which to describe it'.² Marc Sageman, a leading scholar in the field, described al-Qa'ida as 'a new type of terrorism... driven by networks of fanatics determined to inflict maximum civilian and economic damages on distant targets'.³ Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin echoed this analysis, suggesting that 'the new terrorists, unlike their secular counterparts, want a lot of people watching *and* a lot of people dead'.⁴ Bruce Hoffman, one of the most respected academics in the field, essentially agreed with this, arguing that 'on 9/11... Bin Laden wiped the slate clean of the conventional wisdom on terrorists and terrorism and, by doing so, ushered in a new era of conflict – as well as a new discourse about it'.⁵

Although there is increasing recognition that analyses of this type are little more than 'worst case fantasies' (to borrow a phrase from Bernard Brodie), the problem is that there remains a pervasive tendency to 'exoticise' al-Qa'ida and to ascribe it special status in the canon of terrorist organisations.⁶ This tendency has not been without repercussions: overblown descriptions of the threat of al-Qa'ida are commonplace, even rife; there are few genuinely

¹ See, for example, the work of advocates of 'new' terrorism: Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War Against America* (New York: Random House, 2003); Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

² Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (Penguin, 2007). 1.

³ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). vii.

⁴ Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, 'America and the new terrorism', *Survival* 42, no. 1 (2000): 71; for a response and counter-response, see Olivier Roy et al., 'America and the new terrorism: an exchange', *Survival* 42, no. 2 (2000): 71.

⁵ Hoffman cited by Magnus Ranstorp, 'Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects,' in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009), 31.

⁶ Bernard Brodie, 'The Development of Nuclear Strategy', *International Security* 2, no. 4 (1978): 68. cited in John Mueller, 'Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?: The Myth of the Omnipresent Enemy', *Foreign Affairs* 85 (2006): 494; see also Marie Breen Smyth, 'Geographies of Conflict: Meanings and Effects of Political Violence' (paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, San Francisco, 2008).

interdisciplinary studies of al-Qa'ida; the vast majority of studies approach the subject of al-Qa'ida with a problem-solving focus; and much of the field is built on methodologically and theoretically unstable foundations, in particular where primary data is concerned. Of course, there are a growing number of scholars, particularly from the Critical School, who argue vociferously for a change in the field to negate these tendencies.⁷ But despite this, the fact remains that many mainstream voices within the discipline of Terrorism Studies (and in the wider 'terrorism industry') explicitly or implicitly frame al-Qa'ida as an exceptional and unprecedented phenomenon.⁸

By contrast, this research is predicated upon the crucial challenge that al-Qa'ida and its modern affiliates are *not* exceptional or unprecedented terrorist organisations.⁹ This assertion is central to the research because it prepares the ground for two premises which underpin the approach taken in this study. Firstly, if al-Qa'ida has similarities with other violent Islamist groups, comparisons between their strategies, structures and histories ought to provide much insight into their behaviour. Or to put it another way, by understanding how other violent Islamist groups behave, a good deal can be learned about al-Qa'ida and vice versa. Secondly, if al-Qa'ida is not a unique phenomenon, then it is possible to cross-fertilise Terrorism Studies with other fields of scholarship and in so doing to produce interdisciplinary approaches to examining the organisation which are more theoretically and intellectually rigorous.

Taking this challenge and its premises as a point of departure, this study explores the way in which a range of violent Islamist movements in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen formulate and select their strategies. Influenced by theories of cognition advocated in the fields of cognitive psychology, strategic studies and behavioural economics, the research constructs an interdisciplinary approach to strategic decision-making based on the concept of strategic

⁷ See e.g. Andrew Silke, *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures* (Routledge, 2004); Richard Jackson, 'The core commitments of critical terrorism studies', *European Political Science* 6, no. 3 (2007); Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning, *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (London: Routledge, 2009); Jeroen Gunning, 'A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies?', *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007); Harmonie Toros and Jeroen Gunning, 'Exploring a Critical Theory Approach to Terrorism Studies,' in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009).

⁸ This point has been widely made by those from the 'Critical' School'. Richard Jackson, 'Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Terrorism,' in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009), 71; Jackson, 'Core Commitments'; Gunning, 'A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies'; Toros and Gunning, 'Exploring a Critical Theory Approach to Terrorism Studies.'

⁹ A point made by Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton University Press, 2009). 2f. As she phrases it, 'some aspects are unusual, but many are not'.

scripts. These are cognitive structures which allow strategists to form expectations about how a sequence of events might unfold. More specifically, they govern the decision-making process by providing forecasts about the probable outcome of a range of options, enabling the strategist to select a course of action most likely to achieve their desired goals. This theoretical approach is deployed to answer three primary research questions: How do these organisations formulate and select their strategies? How do they intend their strategies to achieve desired political ambitions? And how do their strategic visions unfold in practice?

The principal aim of this research is to investigate the nature, role and influence of a range of strategic scripts on the decision-making processes of the violent Islamist movements under study. As we shall see, because violent Islamists have ambitious goals but limited resources, the scripts (like the choices) available to them are limited; eight scripts are identified for investigation in the case study chapters: survival, power play, mobilisation, provocation, delegitimisation, attrition, co-operation, and de-mobilisation. The second aim of the research is to explore how scripts are operationalised as strategies and to investigate whether these strategies deviate from the course suggested by scripts. Having established that there is a 'strategic gap' between the expected sequences of events (scripts) and the actual course of events (strategies), the third aim is to determine whether the strategic gap is a consequence of the unreliability of scripts, of difficulties in implementing terrorism as a strategy or a combination of the two. The fourth aim is to define and describe the impact of what this research terms 'narrative delusion' on the strategic decision-making processes of violent Islamists. The final and broadest aim is to provide a clear theoretical approach to strategic decision-making based on strategic scripts and narrative delusion which can be applied to other objects of research.

Theoretical Background: The Trouble with Terrorism Studies

Before examining strategic scripts in more detail, it is necessary to provide the theoretical backdrop to the study in order to understand why new approaches to the study of violent Islamism are required. Although a full discussion of the field is impossible, the following review attempts to describe two theoretical strands which run through the secondary literature and which are of particular importance to this thesis because they seek to describe why groups adopt or reject terrorist violence. The first comprises 'root cause' theories which propose a series of factors and processes that drive terrorist violence. The second strand comprises those accounts of individual de-radicalisation and group disengagement; these

theories identify the pathways and routes through which individuals leave terrorist groups and, more broadly, the factors which cause groups to fracture, disintegrate and reject violence. This theoretical overview concludes by identifying a range of theoretical and methodological flaws in the field which not only provide the rationale for adopting a new stance but also influence the way in which the new approach is constructed.

The Move to Violence

Since 9/11, the field of Terrorism Studies has been preoccupied with 'root cause' theories which attempt to reveal the drivers that produce terrorists and terrorist violence. Although much of this material has been criticised for methodological and theoretical weakness, root cause theories have increasingly risen to the fore as key accounts of the origins of terrorist behaviour. The reason for the continued popularity of root cause theories is clear: they rationalise seemingly irrational violence and offer the possibility of identifying – even 'curing' – terrorists before they are able to resort to acts of violence. One academic describes the logic neatly: 'if we determine what drives people to commit such heinous crimes, perhaps we can change their behaviour. Or if their grievances really are just, perhaps we can change ours'.¹⁰

This rationale was nowhere more present than amongst the psychological theories advanced from as early as the 1970s; these described a whole raft of personality disorders and complexes accounting for seemingly irrational terrorist violence. Some psychologists argued that terrorists suffered from 'a paranoid and narcissistic pathology', some proposed that they displayed severe psychopathic or sociopathic tendencies and others suggested that they possessed strongly narcissistic personalities.¹¹ These approaches are now widely discredited: in the mid-1990s, Martha Crenshaw stated unflinchingly that 'the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality' – a criticism reaffirmed by Paul Wilkinson when he argued that 'we already know enough about terrorist behaviour to discount the crude

¹⁰ Karin von Hippel, 'The Roots of Terrorism: Probing the Myths', *The Political Quarterly* 73 (2002): 25.

¹¹ On paranoid narcissism, see Phillip Johnson and Theodore Feldmann, 'Personality Types and Terrorism: Self-Psychology Perspectives', *Forensic Reports* (1992). On psychopathy, see, e.g. Raymond Corrado, 'A Critique of the Mental Disorder Perspective of Political Terrorism', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 4, no. 3-4 (1981). On narcissism, see e.g. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1991); also Richard M. Pearlstein, *The Mind of the Political Terrorist* (SR Books, 1991). For a broader review of psychological approaches, see Martha Crenshaw, 'The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century', *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000); John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (Routledge, 2005); Andrew Silke, *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003); Andrew Silke, *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism* (Routledge, 2010); Jeff Victoroff and Arie Kruglanski, *Psychology of Terrorism: Classic and Contemporary Insights: The Best Writings About the Mind of the Terrorist* (Psychology Press, 2009).

hypothesis of a “terrorist personality” or “phenotype”.¹² Despite this, the implication that psychological anomalies are at the heart of radicalisation is never far away in studies of al-Qa’ida and at the core of much of this research, there is an implicit profile of the type of individuals likely to join the organisation.¹³ As Richard Jackson has pointed out, ‘the notion that terrorist behaviour is rooted in the personality defects of individuals remains close to the surface of most texts, not least in the notion that weak-minded, uneducated, or emotionally vulnerable young Muslims fall prey to indoctrination and brain-washing’.¹⁴

Although terrorist profiling and theories of psychological abnormality now linger only implicitly in the field, approaches predicated on group psychology and organisational behaviour have increasingly risen in their stead. Essentially, two theories dominate: ‘out-group hate’ and ‘in-group love’. The out-group hate model, advocated most notably by Jerrold Post, suggests that embryonic terrorist organisations are characterised by ‘fragmented psychosocial identities’ which are held to varying extents by members of the group.¹⁵ Over time, he argues, groups become increasingly close-knit as members internalise a privileged, valued ‘self’ and externalise a negative, demonised ‘other’ in a process which not only justifies violence but also makes it an obligation.¹⁶ By contrast, the ‘in-group love’ model proposed by Marc Sageman focuses on the crucial role played by internal group dynamics in radicalisation; he argues that self-forming cliques (which he later termed ‘Bunches of Guys’) undergo three non-linear stages in radicalisation: (a.) friendship and discipleship lead to an association with *jihadi* ideology; (b.) ‘one-upmanship’ leads to group intensification of extremist beliefs; and

¹² Martha Crenshaw, ‘The Causes of Terrorism’, *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): 390; Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986; repr., 2nd Edition). 193.

¹³ On profiling, see Irene Jung Fiala, ‘Anything new? The racial profiling of terrorists’, *Criminal Justice Studies* 16, no. 1 (2003); John Horgan, ‘From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (2008). Examples demonstrating this point are rife, but see, for example, the work of Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005); Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi terrorists in Europe, their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad: An exploratory study* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2006); Magnus Ranstorp, ed. *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe* (Routledge, 2009); Robert Leiken, *Europe’s Angry Muslims* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Thomas Pick, Anne Speckhard, and Beatrice Jacuch, *Home-Grown Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalisation among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe* (IOS Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Jackson, ‘Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Terrorism,’ 72.

¹⁵ Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁶ Jerrold M. Post, ‘Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces,’ in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

(c.) contact with an individual outside the group facilitates a semi-formal acceptance into the *jihad*.¹⁷

The primary problem with these – and similar studies – is their weak or suspect evidential base. Post's 1998 study relied on secondary data compiled from a German psychological team's investigation of 250 terrorists in the 1980s and his 2007 study was based entirely on second-hand accounts; neither study reflects on the potential biases in this methodological approach nor provides any systematic method for alleviating bias.¹⁸ Similarly, Sageman's theory relies on a database of 172 individuals he identified as participants in the *jihadi*-Salafi movement.¹⁹ Like Post, his database is compiled from secondary sources, often the media, without any critical reflection on the potential inaccuracies of secondary data or on the pitfalls of relying solely on print and online media in constructing individual histories. Although these methodologies are clearly problematic, it is also worth noting a more fundamental difficulty which pervades studies of terrorist group psychology. By their very nature, these studies are short-termist and short-sighted: they focus on the genesis and development of the interpersonal relationships of a given terrorist 'cluster' over relatively short time-frames and rarely take into account the changing political and social landscapes in which entire groups emerge, operate and recede.

In contrast to theories which look to personal and/or organisational factors in driving radicalisation are those theories which pay far greater attention to the socio-political contexts of terrorism. 'Strain' theorists, for example, propose that (perceived or real) grievances are at the heart of radicalisation and terrorist violence. Poverty, relative deprivation and

¹⁷ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

¹⁸ As Horgan has pointed out, the interviews which underpin Post's thesis were with *suspected* terrorists who had little incentive to co-operate or provide accurate accounts. Post, 'Terrorist psychology: Terrorist behavior as a product of psychological forces'; Post, *Mind of the Terrorist*; John Horgan, 'The Search for the Terrorist Personality,' in *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences*, ed. Andrew Silke (London: John Wiley, 2003). His 2005 article on terrorist group psychology was based on 35 interviews; it is worthwhile noting that much of the study contains interview extracts bereft of analysis: Jerrold M. Post, 'The Socio-Cultural Underpinnings of Terrorist Psychology: When Hatred is Bred in the Bone,' in *Root Causes of Terrorism*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (Routledge, 2005).

¹⁹ There has been some vituperative criticism of Sageman's work; Hoffman, for example, suggests that the 'analysis would have been clearer and more scientifically rigorous had he employed essential and basic tools of social science research and built on the core theories of social and terrorist networks' and comments that the study had 'a surprisingly curt discussion of methodology'; Sageman bluntly responded to these claims by saying, 'to learn from him, I looked for the section on methodology in his book *Inside Terrorism* – but there was none'. Bruce Hoffman, 'The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism - Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters', *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2008): 136. The debate continued: Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, 'Does Osama Still Call the Shots-Debating the Containment of al Qaeda's Leadership', *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2008).

unemployment, they argue, are all factors that drive disaffected elements of society towards violence.²⁰ One of the major criticisms of this position is that whilst grievances are rife, terrorism and terrorists are not.²¹ Others have dealt with this problem by looking to cultural differences as the drivers of the cycle of radicalisation, recruitment, and terrorist action: Samuel Huntington, for example, argued that a growing ideological and cultural disparity between the Islamic world and the West has led to a global 'clash of civilizations', conducted through conflicting religious movements.²² Crenshaw suggested that terrorism – and the reactions and responses it produces in states – are, in effect, civil wars being fought at the international level.²³ The problem with such theories is that they provide unsatisfactory explanations which do 'not do justice to the rich practice of terrorism'.²⁴ To put it another way, it would be difficult to argue that Islamist terrorism occurs independently of religion, politics and globalisation, but the problem is that answering the question 'why do people resort to terrorist violence?' with a response of 'globalisation' or 'religion' lacks the interpretative rigour and explanatory authority which the complex phenomenon of terrorism requires.

The Move from Violence

Although root cause theories have continued to grow in popularity, 'exit' theories which examine the ways in which terrorism ends, have until recently been a worryingly neglected area of research. In 2009, John Horgan wrote one of the first studies of individual disengagement from violent Islamism in which he bemoaned the fact that

... we in the academic community [had] largely ignored almost everything to do with *disengagement* from terrorism. And related

²⁰ Louise Richardson, *The Roots of Terrorism*, Democracy and Terrorism (Routledge, 2006); Seth Jones, 'The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad', *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008). On poverty, see Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, 'Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?', *The New Republic* 2002; Daniel Pipes, 'God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?', *National Interest* 2001/2002. On relative deprivation, see e.g. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Paradigm, 2012). On unemployment, see Ariel Merari, 'The Readiness to Kill and Die: Suicidal Terrorism in the Middle East,' in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990).

²¹ Peter Neumann and Brooke Rogers, 'Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe,' (London: ICSR, 2007), 8.

²² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 2011). For more religious models, see Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat* (John Murray, 2007). 85-93; Khachig Tololyan, 'Cultural Narrative and the Motivation of the Terrorist,' in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David Rapoport (Frank Cass, 2001). See also Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (Columbia University Press, 2006). 81-131; David C. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,' in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (2004).

²³ Martha Crenshaw, 'Why America? The Globalization of Civil War', *Current History* (2001).

²⁴ Isabelle Duyvesteyn, 'How New is the New Terrorism?', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (2004): 446.

to this, with almost everyone writing about radicalisation, why was there nothing about *de-radicalisation*? Why did we not consider the qualities of the pathways *out* of the collective madness?²⁵

More recently, research into disengagement and de-radicalisation has become highly fashionable and multiple approaches now exist. This material can be usefully reviewed by dividing it into macro- and microscopic approaches. At the macroscopic level are those theoretical models which focus on the cyclical nature of terrorist violence. Rapoport, for example, argued that terrorist activity to date has taken place in four waves of approximately forty years – each of which is characterised by its own ideological perspective (although he identifies the presence of nationalist-inspired terrorism in all waves).²⁶ Similarly, Enders and Sandler argued that the frequency of terrorist attacks operates according to an S-curve, experiencing high points every two years.²⁷ Weinberg and Richardson used Conflict Theory to describe the appearance and eventual decline of terrorist groups in terms of emergence, escalation and de-escalation.²⁸ Martha Crenshaw, in the mould of Ted Robert Gurr, argued that terrorist activity occurs in the interstitial spaces between the decline of movements of mass protest.²⁹

These are all positions derived from well-researched historical case studies. But the problem with macroscopic approaches, as Cronin has pointed out, is that they ‘require so much generalization and qualification that their relevance to specific groups becomes remote’.³⁰ Indeed, Cronin’s more recent work attempts to deal with precisely this problem.³¹ Based on an analysis of numerous groups spanning the full ideological spectrum, she provides seven factors at work in the demise of terrorist organisations. Despite this (and to return to the tendency to view al-Qa’ida as a unique phenomenon described at the beginning of the chapter), she argues that al-Qa’ida has unique features – ‘fluid organization, methods of recruitment, funding and means of communication’ – which preclude the effect of many of

²⁵ John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London: Routledge, 2009). iv.

²⁶ Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,' 46-73.

²⁷ Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, 'Transnational Terrorism 1968-2000: Thresholds, Persistence, and Forecasts', *Southern Economic Journal* (2005): 467-82.

²⁸ Leonard Weinberg and Louise Richardson, 'Conflict Theory and the Trajectory of Terrorist Campaigns in Western Europe,' in *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*, ed. Andrew Silke (Routledge, 2004), 138–60.

²⁹ Martha Crenshaw, 'How Terrorism Declines', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (2011).

³⁰ Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups', *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 16.

³¹ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*; Cronin, 'How al-Qaida Ends'; Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Ending Terrorism: Lessons for Defeating al-Qaeda*, Adelphi Papers (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008).

these factors.³² The work of Omar Ashour approaches the topic rather differently. Like Cronin, his study is based on a series of case studies; but unlike Cronin, he attempts to derive a number of variables which determine the outcome of attempts to de-radicalise violent Islamist groups.³³ For Ashour, four determinants need to be present for de-radicalisation to be successful: charismatic leadership, state repression, social interaction and selective inducement.³⁴ The problem with this is that these variables are often conceptually vague and as Thomas Hegghammer rightly notes, 'the absence of metrics of charismatic leadership and social interaction means that one often has to take the author's word for their presence in a given case'.³⁵

The microscopic level, by contrast, encompasses those examinations of the psychological and personal factors involved in disengagement. Bjørge has argued that individual de-radicalisation is produced by a combination of 'push' factors (such as disillusionment with the group's ideology, loss of faith in the activities of the group) and 'pull' factors (the desire to lead a 'normal' life, ties to family and friends, increasing maturity and new opportunities in career prospects).³⁶ Horgan on the other hand argues that psychological factors are critical in individual disengagement, particularly where individuals become disillusioned as a consequence not only of the reality of involvement in terrorist activity, but also of internal disagreements over tactical matters and differences in politics and strategy.³⁷ Others have presented similar theories, albeit less indebted to primary research. Demant *et al*, for example, present three factors – failing ideology, failing movement and adverse living conditions – which exert particular pressure on both right- and left-wing extremists to leave an organisation.³⁸ Michael Jacobson focuses more on individual attitudes to the group and the

³² Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 167-96.

³³ Omar Ashour, *The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (London: Routledge, 2009); see also Omar Ashour, 'De-radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 5 (2010).

³⁴ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 91.

³⁵ Thomas Hegghammer, 'Review of Omar Ashour, *The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*', *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (2011): 473.

³⁶ Tore Bjørge, 'Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right,' in *Leaving terrorism behind: individual and collective disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørge and John Horgan (Taylor & Francis, 2009), 30-48; see also the work of Naureen Fink and Ellie Hearne, 'Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism', *International Peace Institute Report* (2008): 3f; Renée Garfinkel, 'Personal transformations: Moving from Violence to Peace,' *Special Report 186* (US Institute of Peace, 2009).

³⁷ John Horgan, 'Individual Disengagement: a Psychological Analysis,' in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørge and John Horgan (London: Routledge, 2009), 21-27.

³⁸ Froukje Demant et al., *Decline and Disengagement: An Analysis of the Processes of De-radicalization* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: IMES, University of Amsterdam, 2008). 154-58. See also Helen Ebaugh and Rose Fuchs, *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit* (University of Chicago Press, 1988); Kate Barrelle, 'Disengagement from Violent Extremism,' (n.p., n.d.).

leader, asserting that members can become disenchanted with harsh living conditions, disillusioned with the group's direction, find elements of the group's vision self-refuting and have concerns over the nature and role of violence; as these concerns mount, so petty grievances create dissatisfaction with a leader and the departure of the disillusioned.³⁹ In her study of 600 interrogation transcripts of Guantánamo Bay inmates, Curcio similarly found that poor living conditions and shortage of food created disillusionment with the cause.⁴⁰

These theories of individual disengagement are valuable but they also need to be treated with caution, not least because there may be a significant difference between the way a former terrorist rationalises the reasons for their exit and the processes and factors at play at the time of that exit.⁴¹ Disley *et al* reiterate this point when they suggest that these studies are not 'a basis for claims as to the factors that *caused* exit. There may be a difference between what interviewees say, what they feel is an appropriate response at a given point in time or with particular interviewers, and other possible reasons for their actions'.⁴² More broadly, these theories of disengagement suffer from over-specificity precisely because they are individual accounts and there are, potentially, myriad factors which encourage or compel terrorists to leave violent movements. The problem, simply put, is how to derive a theory which is broadly applicable from so broad an array of potential personal factors without losing the analytical rigour which such a theory would require.

The Trouble with Terrorism Studies

The previous section provided an overview of existing literature which focuses on both the move to and the move from violence. These accounts are interesting, at times compelling, but they should also be handled with extreme care for despite their popularity they have been widely criticised. It is useful at this juncture to identify some of these problems not only to

³⁹ Michael Jacobson, 'Terrorist dropouts: Learning from Those who have Left,' (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2010).

⁴⁰ Sharon Curcio, 'The Dark Side of Jihad: how young men detained at Guantanamo assess their experiences,' in *A Future for the Young: Options for helping Middle Eastern Youth Escape the Trap of Radicalization*, ed. Cheryl Benard (RAND, 2006).

⁴¹ One former fringe member of an Egyptian terrorist interviewed for this study claimed that he left because his wife, who had something of a temper, disliked his violent Islamist brothers and became furious with him when he went to meet them. Interview with 'Abdullah', (former violent Islamist), Cairo, 2nd February 2012. Similarly Garfinkel, 'Personal transformations: Moving from Violence to Peace,' 4f., describes an interview she held with Pastor James, leader of a Christian youth militia in Nigeria, for whom the final straw was his wife telling him 'you cannot preach Christianity with hate'. Interesting accounts these may be, but including marriage as a factor (rather than a reason) for disengagement seems to lack academic rigour.

⁴² Emma Disley et al., 'Individual disengagement from Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorist groups: A Rapid Evidence Assessment to inform policy and practice in preventing terrorism,' *RAND Technical Report* (RAND, 2012), 14.

provide a rationale for adopting a different approach in the next section, but also to recognise those recurring pitfalls into which so much of the field is alleged to have fallen and to avoid them in constructing a new approach.

The most common criticism is that terrorism research displays a 'basic theoretical sterility' and a 'lack of methodological rigour' because it is so heavily dependent on secondary data.⁴³ O'Leary and Silke make the point in more vituperative terms, declaring that much of the field 'is written by people who have never met a terrorist, or have never actually spent significant time on the ground in the areas most affected by conflict'.⁴⁴ This criticism is not new; more than thirty years ago, Michael Howard complained that Terrorism Studies was 'responsible for more incompetent and unnecessary books than any other outside... of sociology. It attracts phoneys and amateurs as a candle attracts moths'.⁴⁵ This is exacerbated by the fact that, although primary data is scarce, what little there is can be unreliable. Ranstorp cautions that

... a major global strategic surprise event like 9/11 is bound to attract unscrupulous characters, pseudo-academics alongside outright fraudsters, often masquerading behind a thin façade of privileged access to secret sources... In most cases this type of RUMINT (rumour intelligence) masquerading as scientific evidence lacks any acceptable academic rigor.⁴⁶

Not only are primary data in short supply in terrorism research, then, but the little available is often suspect: for students of terrorism, there is always a faint suspicion that primary material is little more than 'rumour masquerading as scientific evidence', drip-fed into the field by 'unscrupulous characters', re-used and subsequently re-cycled by others until it becomes established fact.⁴⁷

⁴³ A frequent observation, see e.g. Gunning, 'A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies'; John Horgan and Michael J. Boyle, 'A Case against 'Critical Terrorism Studies'', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008); Richard Jackson, 'The Case for a Critical Terrorism Studies', (2007); Jackson, 'Core Commitments'; Ranstorp, 'Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects.'

⁴⁴ Brendan O'Leary and Andrew Silke, 'Understanding and Ending Persistent Conflicts: Bridging Research and Policy,' in *Terror, Insurgency, and the State: Ending Protracted Conflicts*, ed. Marianne Heiberg, Brendan O'Leary, and John Tirman (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 393.

⁴⁵ Although he provides no further reference, the quote is cited by Hoffman, 'The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism - Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters', 136.

⁴⁶ Ranstorp, 'Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects,' 26-31. He provides a scathing critique of 'scholars' such as Alexis Debat, Evan Kohlmann and Rohan Gunaratna.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 26.

Many in the Critical school have argued that the field's theoretical fragility is a consequence of the tendency to view terrorism as a problem to be solved rather than a phenomenon to be studied.⁴⁸ For these scholars, the desire to identify a discrete set of factors, grievances or political processes which drive terrorism in an effort to provide policy-makers with the knowledge to mitigate or pre-empt violence has imbued the field with a political bias that reflects state policy.⁴⁹ Richard Jackson, for example, observed that 'when virtually the entire academic field collectively adopts state priorities and aims, it means that terrorism studies functions ideologically as an intellectual arm of the state and is aligned with its broader hegemonic project'.⁵⁰ 'Orthodox' scholars have countered that there is nothing academically or morally wrong with problem-solving and that helping to prevent loss of life is an admirable aspiration; equally, they remark, there is nothing to suggest that it should mar the reputation of academics as independent researchers.⁵¹ Despite the claims of the critical theorists, assertions concerning the link between terrorism researchers and the state are best construed as over-statements – not least because nearly every field of study has links with Government and academia has long had an obligation to navigate this relationship with care. Nevertheless, the more concerning issue is that the problem-solving tendency has had a tangible impact not only on the type of answers we produce or for whom they are produced, but *on the kind of questions we pose*. Policy relevance is increasingly the guiding factor selection of topics, regions, ideologies and threats as appropriate for examination, but when threats recede, so does the attraction of inquiry and investigation.

The fact that objects of research are important while they have the potential to harm the people and government of (predominantly developed) nations produces the third and related problem that terrorism research is often conducted in a historical vacuum.⁵² Because much research is geared towards problem-solving on behalf the state, terrorist organisations, and al-Qa'ida in particular, tend to be studied from the moment at which they turn to particular acts of violence until the moment that they decline, fail, recede or another fate meets them. Very rarely are terrorist movements located in a historical tradition which might have the effect of

⁴⁸ One academic, for example, complained that 'the predominance of "problem-solving" approaches ... accounts for many of the observed methodological and conceptual shortcomings of "terrorism research"'. Gunning, 'A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies'.

⁴⁹ The point is made widely, see *ibid.*; Jackson, Breen Smyth, and Gunning, *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*; Jackson, 'Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Terrorism,' 76f; Jackson, 'Core Commitments', 245.

⁵⁰ Jackson, 'Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Terrorism,' 78.

⁵¹ Horgan and Boyle, 'A Case against 'Critical Terrorism Studies'.

⁵² Silke, for example, notes that 'Terrorism research has never been especially good at exploring the past'. Andrew Silke, 'Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research,' in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009), 45.

'restoring', in the words of Harmonie Toros and Jeroen Gunning, 'a past and a future to terrorism'.⁵³ Indeed it is indicative that before 2001 only 3.9 percent of articles published had a historical focus – an already negligible figure which, in the wake of 9/11, dropped to 1.7 percent.⁵⁴ For Marie Breen Smyth, this demonstrates a tendency towards 'a-historicity, presuming that terrorism began on 11 September 2001 and ignoring the historical experience of numerous countries and the already burgeoning literature on 'terrorism' published prior to 2001'.⁵⁵ The broader point is that organisations like al-Qa'ida are not unique and much can be gleaned by reference to historical precedents. And yet the field's short-termism – enshrined in its incessant focus on threats in 'the here and now' – has deterred it from asking questions of other, now defunct, organisations from whose experiences and histories lessons can be learned.

The final criticism of the field relating directly to this study is that terrorism research has been extremely reluctant to engage with other fields of scholarship.⁵⁶ There is, for example, little cross-fertilisation with Area Studies despite the fact that the benefits of co-operation are likely to be substantial, the former locating the phenomenon of terrorism in the realities of a region and the latter providing an overarching framework in which to analyse the phenomenon.⁵⁷ By much the same token, approaches which view terrorism as a strategy have been widely overlooked: as M.L.R. Smith and Peter Neumann noted in 2005, 'among [the] flood of (often forgettable) books [on terrorism], what stands out is the absence of any meaningful examination of terrorism as a military strategy'.⁵⁸ Equally, the crossover with the broader

⁵³ Toros and Gunning, 'Exploring a Critical Theory Approach to Terrorism Studies,' 96.

⁵⁴ Silke, 'Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research,' 45f.

⁵⁵ Cited in Ranstorp, 'Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects,' 23.

⁵⁶ Although it is worth noting that some areas, psychology and social movement theory foremost amongst them, are increasingly being applied to the study of terrorism, advocates of these theories tend to remain outside the field. See e.g. Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Paradigm Publishers, 2007); Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006). That Terrorism Studies is less than attractive to researchers in cognate theories (and equally bad at retaining early career researchers) is a well-acknowledged point. See, e.g. Gunning, 'A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies'.

⁵⁷ Katerina Dalacoura, 'Middle East Area Studies and Terrorism Studies,' in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009), 124f.

⁵⁸ M. L. R. Smith and Peter Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism: How it Works, and Why it Fails* (Routledge, 2009). The literature has grown, however; see Charles Tilly, 'Terror as Strategy and Relational Process', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46, no. 1-2 (2005); Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006); Boaz Ganor, 'Terrorism as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare,' in *The Trauma of Terrorism: Sharing Knowledge and*

theories of Security Studies and International Relations has been conspicuously under-explored. Indeed, one scholar goes so far as to say that

the literature on terrorism has largely developed independent of international relations theory. Indeed, many international relations scholars will likely find frustrating some of the main strands of terrorism research, hobbled as it is by a paucity of good data and by the political sensitivity of the topic.⁵⁹

The fact that Terrorism Studies is hermetically sealed from other fields of scholarship is frustrating, particularly when its methodological and theoretical weaknesses are taken into account; nevertheless this is the natural corollary of a field which continues to view its research subject, terrorism, as a special phenomenon which requires special approaches produced by a specialised field. Of course, it goes without saying that there are myriad cognate fields – anthropology, sociology, gender studies, criminology, (social) psychology – with which Terrorism Studies can and perhaps will engage. At this stage in Terrorism Studies' relatively short lifespan, however, such approaches are sorely lacking from the discipline.

Towards a Theory of Terrorist Decision-Making: Strategy, Systems and Scripts

Stagger forward and the language becomes more obscure as all meanings become signs and all concepts are contested...You began this journey supposing you could say useful things about society and politics; now you realise that such claims explain no more than the underlying political stance of the claimants or even factors for which no correction can be made, such as gender, sexual orientation, colour, class and creed.⁶⁰

Thus Lawrence Freedman describes the 'perilous route' through the sociology of knowledge. At this stage in the journey, the scholar is faced with a difficult choice: stagger forward with the expectation that it will be impossible to say 'useful things about society and politics', or turn around in the knowledge that what one says will simply be a complex, coded representation of

Shared Care, An International Handbook, ed. Yael Danieli, Danny Brom, and Joe Sills (Binghamton, NY: Hawthorne Press, 2005); Lawrence Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007); Lawrence Freedman, 'Strategic Terror and Amateur Psychology', *The Political Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2005); Martha Crenshaw, 'Terrorism, Strategies and Grand Strategies', in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (Georgetown University Press, 2004); Martha Crenshaw, 'The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice', in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Woodrow Wilson Center Press: 1998).

⁵⁹ David Leheny, 'Symbols, Strategies, and Choices for International Relations Scholarship After September 11', *International Organization* (2002): 58.

⁶⁰ Lawrence Freedman, 'Confessions of a Premature Constructivist', *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 4 (2006): 690-91.

the self. Students of terrorism face a similar dilemma. The conundrum simply (perhaps too simply) put is that there are two choices: by turning back, the researcher comes across 'root cause' theories and exit theories which have gained credibility as pertinent accounts of the phenomenon of terrorism. But these accounts, as we have seen, suffer from a whole host of problems ranging from methodological weakness to prejudices arising from the inclination towards problem-solving. For most, this is likely to be unsatisfactory. But the prospect of continuing along this path and becoming more self-reflective and self-critical is likely to be equally unpalatable – particularly since the final destination is the domain of the Critical School where it seems virtually impossible to remain an impartial observer and interpreter of an inherently political and contested subject such as terrorism. Indeed, so contested is terrorism that

the very act of data collection – which includes, for example, discerning what events count and do not count as terrorism – cannot be considered entirely value free. The terrorism scholar can try to be as independently minded as possible and test for the robustness of findings based on different definition [sic] of the data, but the basic problem – that terrorism studies is ineluctably political – remains.⁶¹

Whilst the Critical School has been influential in challenging mainstream ideas about terrorism and in revealing some of the assumptions contained within the study of the phenomenon, it suffers, perhaps, from being too theoretical, too self-reflective. This is problematic: when 'all meanings become signs and all concepts are contested', it becomes extremely difficult to derive theory which is not inherently politicised, predicated on the identity of the theorist, constructed by their own lived experiences and based on their interpretation of the world. In short, it becomes virtually impossible to put one's finger on the object of study without simultaneously pointing it at oneself.

If both choices – pressing on or turning around – are unattractive, then perhaps new paths can be forged by those wielding theories from outside the field. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, this dissertation employs just such an interdisciplinary approach in an effort to forge a new path. There are a number of advantages to this. In the first place, by relying on an interdisciplinary approach, the study aims to avoid the well-acknowledged methodological and theoretical weaknesses in Terrorism Studies literature. In the second place, the research examines a wide range of violent Islamist movements operating over a considerable timeframe and thus seeks not only to 'restore a past and a future to terrorism' but also to

⁶¹ Horgan and Boyle, 'A Case against 'Critical Terrorism Studies'', 51-2.

avoid the short-termism that the Critical School holds responsible for much of the politicisation of research in Terrorism Studies.⁶² In the third place, this study attempts to avoid the pitfalls of 'problem-solving' by examining the strategies and strategic decision-making of a range of violent Islamist movements, many long since defunct, rather than of a particular terrorist organisation currently posing a threat to western security.

It is precisely because of the significant and detrimental impact of the problem-solving approach that this research, perhaps unusually, does not conclude with policy recommendations, though doubtless some of the findings could be used to that end. Rather than seeking to 'solve' terrorism, this research attempts to study a particular aspect of a number of organisations – the way in which they formulate strategy – in order to test a theory of terrorist decision-making. The following subsections are devoted to formulating that theory. The discussion begins by examining terrorism as a strategy for achieving political ambitions, laying particular emphasis on terrorism as a coercive 'language' before examining the existing literature on terrorist decision-making in the second subsection. The third part outlines the interdisciplinary approach, based on theories from cognitive and social psychology and the concept of 'scripts', which is adopted in this study. The fourth formally presents the theory of terrorist decision-making and examines a range of terrorist scripts. The fourth and final section examines counter-terrorist scripts.

Terrorism as Strategy, Terrorism as Language

The primary theoretical point of departure of this research is that strategy is a method for bridging the gap between means and ends, or, more informally, for converting what one has into what one wants. As Richard K. Betts phrases it, 'without strategy there is no rationale for how force will achieve purposes worth the price in blood and treasure. Without strategy, power is a loose cannon and war is mindless'.⁶³ In this sense, strategy is about using one's means (financial, military, political, human) to persuade third parties to do what one wants them to or, in more intellectual terms, 'to shape the choices of others, friends and supporters as well as enemies and rivals'.⁶⁴ For those who are vastly superior to their rivals, options are plentiful and strategy is relatively straightforward – often involving little more than the judicious deployment of resources. For those who are underdogs, however, strategy is both more complex and potentially more rewarding: it involves careful deliberation over the use of

⁶² An approach advocated by Gunning, 'A Case for Critical Terrorism Studies'.

⁶³ Richard K. Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?', *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000): 5.

⁶⁴ Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 336.

resources, the creation of unity of action and purpose amongst one's followers and friends, the premeditation of a rival's reactions and the use of cunning, speed, flexibility, adaptation and deceit to outplay an enemy. As Freedman observed, 'the realm of strategy is one of bargaining and persuasion as well as threats and pressure, psychological as well as physical effects, and words as well as deeds... It is about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power'.⁶⁵

From this perspective, terrorism can be seen to be a particular kind of strategy, one deployed (normally by underdogs) to create power by maximising the coercive potential of resources in an effort to reach political ends.⁶⁶ Most studies of terrorist strategy agree that terrorism is deployed to achieve the political goals of its perpetrators, although there is far less agreement about the nature of these goals. For Waugh, these goals are ideological (long-term), strategic (mid-term) and tactical (short-term); Crenshaw distinguishes between long-run political ambitions and the short-term goals of recognition and attention.⁶⁷ Kydd and Walter argue that 'individuals and groups often have hierarchies of objectives, where broader goals lead to more proximate objectives, which then become specific goals in more tactical analyses'.⁶⁸ More recently, Abrahms has differentiated between 'process' goals and 'outcome' goals; the former 'intended to sustain the group by securing financial support, attracting media attention, scuttling organization-threatening peace processes or boosting membership and morale', where the latter are their 'stated political ends'.⁶⁹ For the sake of simplicity, this research distinguishes between primary, long-term goals and secondary, shorter term goals; the latter consists of significant strategic milestones required to attain political goals (e.g. mobilising the population or forming a coalition) and the former consists of those political

⁶⁵ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (OUP, Forthcoming, 2013). xii. My own understanding of strategy has been heavily influenced by discussions with Professor Freedman and I am very grateful to him for his perceptive thoughts and for making a draft of his book available.

⁶⁶ A point made in most studies of terrorist strategy: see, e.g. Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy'; Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*; Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'. Freedman has provided a specific definition that terrorism is a strategy which imposes 'a psychological effect – terror – with a view to creating a political effect that will be manifest in changes in the target's strategy'. Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 310; the coercive interpretation of terrorism is widely supported, see also: Max Abrahms, 'What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy', *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008); Peter Neumann and M. L. R. Smith, 'Strategic Terrorism: The Framework and its Fallacies', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005); Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'; Freedman, 'Strategic Terror and Amateur Psychology'. I have opted for a more generalised definition of terrorism as a strategy not least because the theory of scripts suggests that terrorism can be deployed with multiple purposes in mind.

⁶⁷ William Waugh, 'The Values in Violence: Organizational and Political Objectives of Terrorist Groups', *Journal of Conflict Studies* 3, no. 4 (1983): e.g. 15; Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', 381.

⁶⁸ Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', 52.

⁶⁹ Max Abrahms, 'The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited', *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 360.

objectives which constitute the *prima facie* reason for the existence of the organisation (e.g. the establishment of a caliphate or the expulsion of a colonial power).

Terrorists attempt to achieve these goals, both primary and secondary, by communicating high value, coercive, political statements through violence.⁷⁰ The communicative and linguistic aspects of terrorism are not simply theoretical propositions, but practical ones recognised by terrorists themselves. Khaled Mesha'al, for example, the then leader of Hamas' Political Bureau, proclaimed in the aftermath of 9/11 that 'the Zionist enemy ... only understands the language of *jihad*, resistance and martyrdom; that was the language that led to its blatant defeat in South Lebanon and it will be the language that will defeat it on the land of Palestine'.⁷¹ al-Qa'ida has shown itself to be equally aware that to engage in terrorism is to communicate in a particularly high-value language when other dialogues have brought little success.⁷² Bin Laden, for example, saw terrorist violence as a form of coercive communication which could redress the balance of power between terrorists and their oppositions:

I cannot forget those unbearable scenes [from The First Lebanon War] of blood and severed limbs, the corpses of women and children strewn everywhere, houses destroyed along with their occupants and high rise buildings burying their residents, rockets raining down on our land without mercy. It was as if a crocodile had seized a helpless child, who could do nothing but scream. Tell me: does the crocodile understand any language other than that of force?⁷³

⁷⁰ Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', describe this as 'costly signalling'. Game theorists similarly see a variety of different signals at play in terrorism. For some, violence is an indication of the strength of an organisation in comparison to a Government; see, e.g. Harvey Lapan and Todd Sandler, 'Terrorism and signalling', *European Journal of Political Economy* 9, no. 3 (1993); Per Baltzer Overgaard, 'The Scale of Terrorist Attacks as a Signal of Resources', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, no. 3 (1994). Violence is also viewed as a response to a Government's willingness (or lack of it) to increase economic and/or political freedom; see e.g. Brock Blomberg, Gregory Hess, and Akila Weerapana, 'Economic Conditions and Terrorism', *European Journal of Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (2004). It is also seen as a product of the refusal to make concessions, see Daniel Arce and Todd Sandler, 'Terrorist Signalling and the Value of Intelligence', *British Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 4 (2007). Of course, it goes without saying that not all communications through violence are believed or even understood by their audiences, nevertheless that is a matter for the realities of terrorism rather than for the way it is intended to work. See Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'. Also Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Yale University Press, 1967). 3f. Here, he makes a similar point that coercion can only work if the coerced understands the ultimatum and demands presented by the coercer.

⁷¹ Cited by Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*: 155.

⁷² Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', 50f. Also Arce and Sandler, 'Terrorist Signalling and the Value of Intelligence'.

⁷³ Gilles Kepel et al., *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words* (Harvard University Press, 2010). 72.

al-Zawahiri was similarly explicit that his followers should be 'sure to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy, kill the greatest number of people, for this is the only language understood by the West'.⁷⁴

Of course, strategic terrorism is not simply an attempt to send coercive messages to an opposition, it is also an attempt to communicate one's ideology and political ambitions to friends, allies and potential recruits in an effort to maintain or mobilise support.⁷⁵ In this sense, violence can be seen in terms of what Thomas Thornton referred to as an 'advertisement of the cause'; terrorism provides a spectacle that communicates a movement's commitment to violence, its political vision and, in so doing, incites others to join.⁷⁶ Like the coercive aspects of terrorism, this proselytising element has been well-acknowledged by other terrorist groups. Bakunin, the great proponent of the 'propaganda of the deed' model, famously wrote that violence spreads 'principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda'.⁷⁷ Or to put it in the oft-quoted words of Brian Michael Jenkins, 'terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening, not a lot of people dead'.⁷⁸ From this perspective terrorism communicates, simultaneously, with two audiences: it sends high profile coercive messages to an target government through its civilian population. Simultaneously, however, terrorism communicates with potential supporters, advertising the cause, proselytising its ideology and providing a statement of likely future action.

Terrorist Decision-Making: Existing Theory and the Limits of Rational Choice

The previous subsection discussed the way in which terrorism is designed to achieve both short- and long-term goals, but said less about why organisations decide that terrorism is a preferable strategy. Essentially there are two strands of thought and it is useful to examine both to provide the backdrop to the theoretical approach taken in the research. For some scholars, terrorism is a logical strategy because it has been surprisingly successful in achieving

⁷⁴ Ibid., 204.

⁷⁵ A point made by Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 321.

⁷⁶ Thomas Thornton, 'Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,' in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (Greenwood Press: 1980); see also Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', 386.

⁷⁷ Mikhail Bakunin, 'Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis,' ed. Sam Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchy. Selected works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973). On the propaganda of the deed model, see Marie Fleming, 'Propaganda By The Deed: Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in Late Nineteenth-Century Europe', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 4, no. 1 (1980).

⁷⁸ Brian Michael Jenkins, 'International Terrorism: A New Mode of Conflict,' in *International Terrorism and World Security*, ed. David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 15. This quotation was reworked by Simon and Benjamin (see n.4 on p.3) to highlight al-Qa'ida's unique lethality and indiscriminate targeting policy.

desired political ambitions. Based on his analysis of the gains of Palestinian terrorist organisations, for example, Alan Dershowitz famously argued that terrorism has shown itself to be a successful strategy and therefore 'an entirely rational choice to achieve a political objective'.⁷⁹ David Lake argues that terrorism is 'rational and strategic' because it increases the means available to 'extremists' and thus improves their bargaining position.⁸⁰ Sprinzak suggests that 'the prevalence of suicide terrorism during the last two decades testifies to its gruesome effectiveness'.⁸¹ Kydd and Walter contend that terrorism is effective when the aim is to sabotage peace deals; they argue that of the fourteen agreements negotiated between 1988 and 1998, only 1 in 4 were implemented in the face of terrorist campaigns, whereas 6 out of 10 were successful against a backdrop of peace.⁸² Robert Pape asserts that of the eleven suicide campaigns deployed between 1980 and 2001, six 'closely correlate with significant policy changes by the target state toward the terrorists' major political goals'.⁸³

The difficulty with the argument that terrorism is a rational choice because it has been effective is that empirical studies suggest that terrorism is invariably *unsuccessful*. Taking the criterion presented by Crenshaw that terrorism is violence 'directed against governments for purposes of political change', then terrorism has not been a successful strategy. Few terrorist groups achieve the primary political ambitions for which they so persistently call, although they have more success in highlighting their cause and gaining temporary advantages over target governments. Indeed, this point was made by Thomas Schelling, who suggested that terrorists frequently accomplish 'intermediate means toward political objectives... but with a few exceptions it is hard to see that the attention and publicity have been of much value except as ends in themselves'.⁸⁴ Gould and Klor similarly suggest that there is an intermediate point past which terrorism becomes self-refuting, noting that 'terror activity beyond a certain threshold seems to backfire on the goals of terrorist factions by hardening the stance of the targeted population'.⁸⁵ In his study of 28 terrorist organisations, Max Abrahms calculated that

⁷⁹ Alan Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge*, New edition ed. (Yale University Press, 2003). 86.

⁸⁰ David Lake, 'Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in The Twenty-First Century', *Dialog-IO* 1, no. 1 (2002).

⁸¹ Ehud Sprinzak, 'Rational Fanatics', *Foreign Policy* 120 September–October (2000).

⁸² Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, 'Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence', *International Organization* 56, no. 02 (2002).

⁸³ Robert Pape, 'The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism', *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (2003): 351f; Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005).

⁸⁴ Thomas Schelling, 'What Purposes Can 'International Terrorism' Serve?', in *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, ed. Raymond Frey and Christopher Morris (Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*.

⁸⁵ Eric Gould and Esteban Klor, 'Does Terrorism Work?', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125, no. 4 (2010): 1507.

terrorism achieved policy objectives only 7 per cent of the time.⁸⁶ Paul Wilkinson agreed with this conclusion, finding that the 'track record in attaining major political objectives abysmal'.⁸⁷ To put it more simply, a brief glance at the history of terrorism suggests that terrorism, for all its coercive potential, rarely achieves long-term political aspirations, although it might be more successful at gaining the upper hand temporarily or in producing concessions. Clearly, there are notable exceptions to this – the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), the Irgun and Stern Gang, *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* (EOKA) all spring to mind. Nevertheless, these are exceptions to the rule; in the words of Lawrence Freedman, 'terrorism, when used on its own with the intention of transforming whole societies in order to achieve grandiose political objectives, is almost destined for futility'.⁸⁸

Alongside those who suggest that terrorism is logical because it has been effective are those who argue that terrorism is a rational choice made by collectives of rational actors.⁸⁹ McCormick for example, argued that terrorist organisations could be viewed as 'unitary actors', 'defined by a single, stable, and ordered set of preferences, that is able to identify, evaluate, and decide among competing options with a single mind'.⁹⁰ Martha Crenshaw similarly wrote that 'campaigns of terrorism depend on rational political choice. [They are] the result of an organization's decision that it is a politically useful means to oppose a

⁸⁶ Max Abrahms, 'Why Terrorism Does Not Work', *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006).

⁸⁷ Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (Frank Cass Publishers, 2000). 21.

⁸⁸ Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 335. The reasons for the strategic failure of terrorism are less examined – presumably because the idea that terrorism works continues to hold many in thrall. For Neumann and Smith, terrorism fails not only because it tends to fall into an 'escalation trap', but also because it seeks to attain political ambitions through 'the exploitation of the psychological rather than the destructive effects of armed action'; this, they argue, is ineffective against states who view the outcomes of conflict in terms of the resulting balance of military power. Abrahms, by contrast, argues that terrorism is a largely unsuccessful strategy because it fails to communicate terrorist objectives. Target governments, he argues, interpret terrorist acts in terms of their immediate effects (the death of its civilians) which are then viewed as a threat to the social order rather than in terms of stated terrorist objectives. See Neumann and Smith, 'Strategic Terrorism'; Abrahms, 'The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited'.

⁸⁹ See, e.g. Waugh, 'The Values in Violence'; Harvey Waterman, 'Reasons and Reason: Collective Political Activity in Comparative and Historical Perspective', *World Politics* 33, no. 4 (1981); Arce and Sandler, 'Terrorist Signalling and the Value of Intelligence'; Enders and Sandler, 'Transnational Terrorism 1968-2000: Thresholds, Persistence, and Forecasts'; Lapan and Sandler, 'Terrorism and signalling'; Harvey Lapan and Todd Sandler, 'To Bargain or Not To Bargain: That Is The Question', *The American Economic Review* 78, no. 2 (1988); Todd Sandler, John Tschirhart, and Jon Cauley, 'A Theoretical Analysis of Transnational Terrorism', *The American Political Science Review* 77, no. 1 (1983); Kevin Siqueira and Todd Sandler, 'Terrorists versus the Government: Strategic Interaction, Support, and Sponsorship', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (2006); Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'; Kydd and Walter, 'Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence'; Neumann and Smith, 'Strategic Terrorism'; Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*; Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy'.

⁹⁰ Gordon McCormick, 'Terrorist Decision Making', *Annual Review of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2003): 482.

government... Terrorism is seen collectively as a logical means to advance desired ends'.⁹¹ The difficulty with such approaches is twofold. First is that, with the benefit of hindsight, rational actors do not necessarily produce rational actions: decisions can be made on the basis of incomplete information, a misreading of the situation, from different first principles or to avoid being predictable.⁹² The second difficulty is that terrorist organisations are far from unified collectives, possessing a single outlook and a single mind; rather they are fluctuating, disparate and nebulous, characterised by a multitude of conflicting visions and opinion. This is why terrorist organisations rarely seem to be able to make strategic choices without internal discontent and dissent. Because means are meagre and political goals ambitious, the selection and formulation of terrorist strategy is a highly contested process which often results in internal disagreements, factionalisation, fallings-out and outright feuding.⁹³

*A Theory of Terrorist Decision-Making:
Bounded Rationality, Dual Process Models and Strategic Scripts*

The difficulties in existing theories of terrorist decision-making can be avoided by adopting approaches to decision-making widely advocated in social psychology and behavioural economics. Herbert Simon, whose concept of 'bounded rationality' has been so influential in these fields, argued that decisions could only be as rational as the information, intelligence and time available to the decision-maker allowed.⁹⁴ He recognized that perceptions of the world are not always accurate, that processing power was often limited and thus that decisions do not always bring about outcomes as expected. Instead, he argued, decision-makers are often 'satisficers' because they accept outcomes which are adequate rather than optimal.

Scholars such as Daniel Kahneman have built upon this theory arguing that there are two types of decision-making: System 1 and System 2.⁹⁵ System 1 is 'unconscious, rapid, automatic and high capacity'.⁹⁶ It is 'an associative machine' or 'mental shotgun' which 'continuously

⁹¹ Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', 385.

⁹² See Freedman, *Strategy: A History*: ch 13.

⁹³ A point made by Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 336-37.

⁹⁴ Herbert Simon, *Models of Bounded Rationality, Vol. 3: Empirically Grounded Economic Reason* (MIT Press, 1997); see also Herbert Simon, 'From Substantive to Procedural Rationality,' in *Method and Appraisal in Economics*, ed. Spiro Latsis (Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁹⁵ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Penguin, 2012); he adopts the terms System 1 and System 2 from Keith Stanovich and Richard West, 'Individual Differences in Reasoning: Implications for the Rationality Debate?', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23, no. 5 (2000). The latter now prefer Type 1 and Type 2.

⁹⁶ Jonathan St B. T. Evans, 'Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment, and Social Cognition', *Annual Review of Psychology* 59, no. 1 (2008): 256.

monitors what is going on outside and inside the mind, and continuously generates assessments of various aspects of the situation without specific intention and with little or no effort'.⁹⁷ This form of impulsive or intuitive decision-making can be very powerful, particularly when situations really are stereotypical and formulaic. But, because these choices are rapid, involuntary and impulsive, it also means that they can be inaccurate or inadequate.⁹⁸ On examination, seemingly similar situations might be discovered to be incongruent, outcomes assumed to be likely found improbable and infallible predictions entirely fallible. System 2, by contrast, is conscious, slow, deliberative and 'effortful', but unlike System 1, it 'can follow rules, compare objects on several attributes and make deliberate choices'.⁹⁹ System 2 is triggered when 'an event is detected that violates the model of the world that System 1 maintains' – that is, when questions posed are too complex for System 1 to solve, when situations are unusual or when answers require a high level of precision.¹⁰⁰ System 2 is responsible for complex or unusual situations that do not conform to stereotypical situations which require more deliberation, accounting for a range of variables, the actions of multiple players and the potential impact of random events.

It is worth noting that dual process theories of cognition are normally applied to individuals, but they work equally well for organisations (business, political and, for that matter, terrorist). Organisational decision-making is normally in the realm of System 2, in part because 'they naturally think more slowly and have the power to impose orderly procedures' through the management hierarchy.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, there is room for System 1 scripts: a chief executive may make intuitive decisions in the face of new situations without considering all the relevant factors, although System 2 is often required to convert these into compelling arguments in order to persuade shareholders of the value of decisions or to inform employees about a new policy. Terrorist decision-making is, similarly, predominantly in the realm of System 2 as leaders (or leadership councils) deliberate and debate which course of action is most suitable. System 1 decisions, for terrorist organisations, often involve leaders making snap judgements when their organisation is vulnerable or semi-autonomous parts of the organisation making intuitive decisions about how to respond to a rapidly changing situation.

⁹⁷ Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 51-58 and 89.

⁹⁸ Fallacies are present throughout cognition, but for their impact on terrorist decision-making, see below. For a discussion of biases and heuristics in cognition more generally, see *ibid.*; also Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, 'Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases', *Science* 185, no. 4157 (1974); Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁹⁹ Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 36.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 417-8.

All this says much about the decision-making process, but less about why choices might be attractive nor why particular courses of action might appeal more than others. This is where the central concept of scripts comes in to play. In a different context bridging the fields of Linguistics and Artificial Intelligence, Schank and Abelson defined a script as a

structure that describes an appropriate sequence of events in a particular context. A script is made up of slots and requirements about what can fill those slots... and what is in one slot affects what is in another. Scripts handle stylized everyday situations. They are not subject to much change, nor do they provide the apparatus for handling totally novel situations. Thus a script is a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that define a well-known situation'.¹⁰²

Deborah Welch Larson, in her analysis of policy-making, argued that scripts are 'rules for handling particular types of situations' which enable decision-makers to 'select from the available alternatives by generating expectations about how the other side will react to various policy options'.¹⁰³ Scripts differ from plans, however, in that they incorporate elements of uncertainty and improvisation: where plans provide a step-by-step process in which each effect is logically and necessarily derived from its preceding cause, scripts allow for unanticipated reactions and the random impact of unexpected events.¹⁰⁴ In a later article, Abelson would similarly see a script in less rigid terms as

a hypothesized cognitive structure that when activated organizes comprehension of event-based situations. In its weak sense, it is a bundle of inferences about the potential occurrence of a set of events... In its strong sense, it involves expectations about the order as well as the occurrence of events. In the strongest sense of a totally ritualized event sequence (e.g., a Japanese tea ceremony),

¹⁰² Roger Schank and Robert Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry Into Human Knowledge Structures* (Psychology Press, 1977). 41. See also Robert Abelson, 'Script Processing in Attitude Formation and Decision-Making,' in *Cognition and Social Behavior*, ed. John S. Carroll and John W. Payne (Oxford: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1976); Robert Abelson, 'Psychological Status of the Script Concept', *American Psychologist* 36, no. 7 (1981); Roger Schank and Robert Abelson, 'Scripts, Plans, and Knowledge,' *Proceedings of the 4th International Joint Conference on Artificial intelligence* (Tbilisi: Morgan Kaufmann 1975); Schank and Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding*.

¹⁰³ Deborah Welch Larson, 'The Role of Belief Systems and Schemas in Foreign Policy Decision-Making', *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): 24. Geva and Mintz similarly differentiate between schemata and scripts which refer to 'sequences of events in the environment'. Nehemia Geva and Alex Mintz, *Decision-making on War and Peace: The Cognitive-rational Debate* (New York: Lynne Rienner 1997). 73; see also Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor, *Social Cognition* (McGraw-Hill, 1991).

¹⁰⁴ This is somewhat different to Schank and Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding*: 72. For them as for us, scripts and plans compete for the same role, but they see scripts as specific and plans as general. This is partly because of the different role of scripts in computing programming.

script predictions become infallible—but this case is relatively rare.¹⁰⁵

From this perspective, scripts are at the heart of decision-making because they aid the interpretation of a situation, identify suitable actions or reactions and provide expectations about the likely sequence of events and likely outcome of that sequence. In the System 1 sense, scripts are largely stereotypical, providing intuitive readings of a situation and suggesting essentially automatic, instinctive responses. System 1 scripts, as Freedman argues, ‘often serve as substitutes for original thought or consideration of the particularities of situations. While they may be validated if acted upon, they may turn out to be wrong... [or] may result in predictable behavior and miss variations in the context that should demand original responses’.¹⁰⁶ System 2 scripts are the product of ‘effortful’ thought and deliberation; they require conscious consideration, recognition of a range of factors, actors and constraints in a given situation and the identification of multiple possible actions. System 2 scripts may have their origins in System 1 scripts, or may be influenced by the decision-maker’s knowledge of analogous situations or personal experience, but ‘they have to take the present as a starting point and project forward... [they] are stories about the future, starting with imaginative fiction but with an aspiration to nonfiction’.¹⁰⁷

All this can be fruitfully translated to the realm of terrorist strategic decision-making.¹⁰⁸ As a particular political situation arises – a sudden and vigorous government clamp down on terrorist personnel, for example – System 1 conducts a rapid, automatic calculation and suggests intuitive responses, identifies their likely outcomes and makes predictions about the reactions of others. In this case, for example, intuitive scripts such as violent reprisals on government forces or the temporary suspension of terrorist activities might be suggested.

¹⁰⁵ He notes this last version is ‘relatively rare’: Abelson, ‘Psychological Status of the Script Concept’, 717; Dennis Gioia and Peter Poole, ‘Scripts in Organizational Behavior’, *Academy of Management Review* (1984): 454f., provides a broader ‘continuum’ of scripts and analyses their operation in organisational behaviour concluding that scripts can act as metaphors that provide understanding of formalised organisational events such as meetings.

¹⁰⁶ Freedman, *Strategy: A History*: 620.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 621.

¹⁰⁸ Perhaps surprisingly, dual process theories have been employed in studies of decision-making as a general category (rather than the specific category of terrorism) relatively rarely (Evans, ‘Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment, and Social Cognition’, 266.). See, however, Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (MIT Press, 1999); Kenneth Hammond, *Human Judgment and Social Policy: Irreducible Uncertainty, Inevitable Error, Unavoidable Injustice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Daniel Kahneman and Shane Frederick, ‘Representativeness Revisited: Attribute Substitution in Intuitive Judgement,’ in *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment*, ed. Thomas Gilovich, Dale Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Daniel Kahneman and Shane Frederick, ‘A Model of Heuristic Judgment,’ in *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*, ed. Keith Holyoak and Robert Morrison (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

These intuitive reactions and predictions are then approved, rejected or modified by System 2. In some situations, System 1 scripts are endorsed and intuitive (re-)actions are implemented; in situations which are unusual, complex or break the models to which System 1 is accustomed, System 2 is summoned to conduct more specific or detailed processing, often calling on alternative information – historical analogy, personal experience, advice, discussion with peers – to produce a more deliberative response which takes account of the peculiarities of the situation. In the example given above, for instance, an organisation might deploy extreme violence in an attempt to provoke the government into increasingly heavily-handed responses which win sympathy for the terrorist cause.

Violent Islamist Strategic Scripts

Conceivably, scripts are infinite in number; strategists can formulate new scripts as they so desire: these can be idiosyncratic, unrealistic and occasionally absurd; they can also be insightful, predictive and meaningful. However, potentially successful scripts have to take account of so many other factors – availability of resources, the complexity or attainability of desired goals, the exigencies of the operating environment, and so on – that in practice, there are often relatively few scripts even for those with considerable resources. Terrorists, because they usually have ambitious political aspirations and only meagre means to pursue those aspirations, invariably have access to an even smaller number of scripts than those with greater materiel. In the case studies, violent Islamist strategic options were similarly restricted by their lack of military, human and financial resources. These chapters examined fourteen more or less discrete organisations active in three different countries and operating at some point during a sixty year period. Only eight scripts were identified in the case study chapters: survival, power play, mobilisation, provocation and polarisation, de-legitimisation, attrition, co-operation, and de-mobilisation. To be clear, whilst the terminology is my own, each of these scripts represents a relatively stereotyped structure through which violent Islamists interpret situations, envisage interactions with their oppositions and allies, and, most importantly, through which they formulate their strategies. It is useful to examine the nature of the scripts and the sequences of events they describe in advance of the case studies not only to provide further clarity to the theoretical approach but also to simplify identification of the scripts in the case studies.

The first script, which the research refers to interchangeably as ‘survival’ and ‘fight or flight’, involves doing ‘whatever it takes’ to ensure the continued existence of the organisation. Although much emphasis has been laid on terrorism as a strategy for achieving largely

grandiose political aims, in practice, this can be difficult: often the resources are simply not available for a major confrontation or the environment is so hostile that political goals cannot be pursued in safety. Thus, in spite of all their lofty rhetoric about political ends, terrorists frequently have the far simpler aim of 'getting to the next stage' so that the situation can be reappraised and new choices made.¹⁰⁹ As the 'fight or flight' moniker suggests, this is an intuitive, impulsive System 1 script which emerges when terrorist organisations are particularly vulnerable – normally when they are embryonic violent movements or when they have lost a particularly charismatic leader or large portions of their membership to counter-terrorism efforts. The script occurs in two forms: organisations lash out at their oppositions with violence in an effort to force them to back away; alternatively, groups go into hiding, waiting for the environment to become more amenable to the pursuit of loftier aims.

Like survival, the second script aims to sustain the movement when it is struggling. In the 'power play' script, violence is essentially inner-directed in that it is more concerned with (re-)acquiring resources rather than achieving ends. The power play script envisages deploying violence in order to cement a leader's authority in the face of impending group fracture or with a view to establishing an organisation's reputation over that of rivals. In the inter-group sense, terrorist violence smothers growing internal dissent or averts potential organisational splits by constructing a persuasive narrative that a failing leader still has control or that an unpopular leader retains their commitment to violence and is not as weak as dissenting elements considered.¹¹⁰ At the organisational level, where the power play script is normally referred to as 'outbidding', violence broadcasts a statement of intent to the public 'that the terrorists have greater resolve to fight the enemy than rival groups, and therefore are worthy of support'.¹¹¹

The third script is 'provocation'.¹¹² The standard formulation is that terrorist violence stings an opposition into a repressive or aggressive reaction which is out of proportion to the original act and which, in turn, increases public sympathy for the terrorists and reduces the

¹⁰⁹ This is a major feature described in Freedman, *Strategy: A History*.

¹¹⁰ Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'. They refer to this as 'intimidation'.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 51. The fullest treatment of outbidding is in Mia Bloom, *Dying To Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (Columbia University Press, 2005). See also Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, 'Outbidding and the Overproduction of Terrorism,' (n.p. 2009); Mia Bloom, 'Palestinian suicide bombing: Public support, market share, and outbidding', *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 1 (2004). A critique is provided by Robert Brym and Bader Araj, 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing Revisited: A Critique of the Outbidding Thesis', *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 3 (2008).

¹¹² Martha Crenshaw, 'Terrorism and Global Security,' in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R. Aall (US Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 73; Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'; Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 118f.

government's own popularity. The script is not without its risks, however; while repression may well increase support for the organisation, it may also mean that the majority of its members are caught up in mass arrests, endangering the group's continued survival.¹¹³ In this sense, provocation to over-reaction is decidedly a means-oriented script: its immediate aim is not to overthrow the government, but to gain resources in the form of broad political support and, potentially, new recruits. Although the provocation script normally involves over-reactions, it can, in relatively rare circumstances, produce under-reactions.¹¹⁴ Here, violence is deployed, often against minority communities, to stretch governments when they are faced with other, more pressing, security threats. Stretched as they are, governments are unable to counter yet further challenges to the security of the state and target communities are left to fend for themselves. For the terrorist strategist, the script aims simultaneously to de-legitimise the authority of government, and to polarise large sections of the population. The point about both strands of the provocation script is that they force target governments to make choices between two options: over-react or under-react. In each case, the outcome is favourable to the terrorist organisation because it provides resources at the expense of government support.

The fourth script, de-legitimation, similarly forces governments to make decisions they would rather avoid.¹¹⁵ In this script, particular acts of violence, often against unpopular foreign presence on home territory, force a government to choose between supporting its allies and its opposition.¹¹⁶ On the one hand, defending foreign presence is widely unpopular but it is a necessary task if powerful allies are to be maintained; on the other hand, doing nothing will inevitably be interpreted as weakness, or worse, complicity with the terrorist organisation.¹¹⁷ From the terrorist perspective, this is, once again, about accruing means in

¹¹³ A point made similarly by Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 119.

¹¹⁴ Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*: 581 refers to this as 'power deflation'.

¹¹⁵ A number of academics argue that de-legitimation is a product of a broader strategy of polarisation which 'tries to divide and de-legitimise the state... [by] driving regimes sharply to the right and ultimately forcing populations to choose between the terrorist cause and brutal state repression... the goal is to force divided populations further apart, fragmenting societies to the extent that it is impossible to maintain a stable, moderate middle within a functioning state'. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 119. See also Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [Les Damnés de la Terre], trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 2005); Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface,' *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005 [1961]).

¹¹⁶ The same point is also made by Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', 69-70; Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*: 580f.

¹¹⁷ Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, for example, imagined that by attacking the US in Saudi Arabia, the regime would be forced 'to defend the US and ... lose their legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims leading the religious establishment to defend [the Americans] which in turn will make them lose their legitimacy'. Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (London: Free Press, 2006). 115-16. See also Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (Red and Black Publishers, 2008). He noted in his chapter on popular support: 'The role of the urban guerrilla, in order

the form of political support and recruitment: if the government sides with its allies rather than its own people, then the terrorist organisation has an opportunity to convert substantial sections of the opposition support base into supporters of its own cause. Of course, if the government decides not to defend its allies then it implicitly confers legitimacy and approval onto the terrorist cause, once again aiding it in terms of support.

The fifth script is mobilisation and it is both means- and ends-focused, making it particularly popular amongst terrorist movements.¹¹⁸ For most scholars of terrorist strategy, it is a by-product of government responses, repression in particular.¹¹⁹ Based on the theory of scripts, this research, however, views mobilisation as a strategic goal in its own right. It is a way of balancing the need to acquire resources with the desire to pursue ends. By mobilising others, the strategist envisages a genuinely global and largely autonomous movement fighting, both at home and abroad, for the same political ends. The strategic vision is as follows: spectacular acts of terrorism have the capacity to inspire fringe elements of the movement to construct their own campaigns of low-level violence; attempts to clamp down on these violent enterprises produce dissatisfaction among more moderate elements of the movement, who are similarly inspired to violence; further attempts to extinguish multiple fires result in even harsher terrorist responses, in turn, creating further grievances and continued mobilisation for the terrorists. In this (rarely attained) form, mobilisation is decidedly a product of System 2 decision-making, in that it envisages the actions of multiple players numerous moves ahead.

The most ends-oriented script is that of attrition. Normally, terrorist strategists who opt for this script have access to substantial resources (significant personnel, extensive finance, considerable military supplies and most importantly, sizeable political support from non-violent moderates) in order to conduct a long-term campaign and to survive in the face of

to win the support of the population, is to continue fighting, keeping in mind the interests of the people and heightening the disastrous situation within which the government must act. These are the conditions, harmful to the dictatorship, which permit the guerrillas to open rural warfare in the middle of an uncontrollable urban rebellion'.

¹¹⁸ Social movement theorists make a similar point, e.g. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*; Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

¹¹⁹ Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford University Press, 2011); Jeroen Gunning, 'Social Movement Theory and the Study of Terrorism,' in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, ed. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Routledge, 2009); Ziad Munson, 'Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood', *The Sociological Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2001); Neumann and Rogers, 'Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe'; Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement,' in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'; Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*.

reprisals.¹²⁰ Terrorist organisations with means on this scale anticipate a long-term campaign of strategic violence against their opposition; although they recognise that no attack is likely to achieve their desired political ends they also recognise that no government response is sufficiently lethal to render the organisation a *coup de grâce*.¹²¹ The attrition script envisages the gradual wearing down of one's opposition, reducing their financial and military capabilities, their political capital and their resolve. As such it often ends not in the crushing defeat of the enemy, but in their capitulation, often after negotiation, to at least some of the demands made by the terrorists.¹²² Although the script can be effective, particularly on oppositions located in foreign territory, the critical problem for the strategist is whether the means available really are sufficient for making a threat – and maintaining that threat – against a state.

Thus far we have examined six scripts, all of which are predicated on violence. It is worth noting that of these scripts, only two have an element directed towards pursuing the political aims that terrorism is designed to achieve. The remainder deploy violence in an attempt to acquire resources, reflecting the persistent concern of most terrorist organisations that their means are insufficient. One script that similarly seeks to accrue resources, although without the use of violence, is co-operation. This script envisages forming alliances (co-operative relationships between those whose political objectives are analogous but whose strategy for achieving political ends, terrorism and insurgency for example, are different) or coalitions (formed with political actors whose objectives are different, often directly opposing, to those of the terrorist) with third parties.¹²³ For alliances, the logic is that the combined efforts of two

¹²⁰ Bader Araj, 'Harsh State Repression as a Cause of Suicide Bombing: The Case of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008); Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*; Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', 59-66.

¹²¹ This is much as it was described by Delbrück in his *History of the Art of War* in which 'the battle is merely one of several equally effective means of attaining the political ends of the war and is essentially no more important than the occupation of territory, the destruction of crops or commerce and the blockade'. Gordon A. Craig, 'Delbrück: The Military Historian,' in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (OUP Oxford, 1986), 341-42. See also John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); John Fearon, 'Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation', *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (1998).

¹²² Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', 60-63 describes three conditions favourable to success: the degree to which the state has interests in the disputed issue, constraints over the nature and magnitude of response and the capacity for tolerating the effects of a campaign of violence.

¹²³ The definition of alliances is broadly derived from that of Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Cornell University Press, 1990). His definition of an alliance (p.12) is 'a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states'. For the purposes of non-state actors, the nature of the political objective – security – can be dispensed with, but not the fact that objectives and ambitions are aligned. See also Stephen M. Walt, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power', *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985); Hans J. Morgenthau, Kenneth W. Thompson, and David Clinton, *Politics Among Nations* (McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2005); George Liska, *Nations in*

opposition movements will increase the coercive leverage on the regime. For coalitions, by contrast, terrorists have the 'breathing space' to acquire support and may even receive benefits from their coalition partners. Advantages for the latter come in the form of controlling a rival: particular ways of converting means to ends, violence chief amongst them, are outlawed and punishments ranging from sanctions to the dissolution of the coalition are threatened if the other partner transgresses particular 'red lines'.¹²⁴

When all options have been exhausted or deemed unrealistic, terrorist organisations opt for the final script investigated by this research: de-mobilisation.¹²⁵ This script is distinguished from the related processes of de-radicalisation and disengagement; whereas the latter are forced on organisations (chiefly as a consequence of counter-terrorism efforts) de-mobilisation refers to the pursuit of political objectives by other, non-violent means.¹²⁶ Indeed, to take this further, terrorist organisations adopt this script when, and only when, they calculate that non-violent means are the best way of maximising their resources in the pursuit of desired political ends. In this sense, the de-mobilisation script is solely the feature of System 2 decision-making, in that it is a deliberative strategic choice made by actors still pursuing political goals rather than a fate pressed on an organisation by the success of counter-terrorism strategies. Under this script, organisations reject violence with the intention of pursuing an alternative strategy, normally involving the creation of a non-violent political movement or a political party. This can be a highly effective way of constructing a narrative which confers legitimacy on desired political ambitions but, like all scripts, it can be difficult to implement. All too often, sections of an organisation are reluctant to follow the strategy and continue with their campaigns of violence, fracturing the hard-won image of

Alliance: The Limits of Interdependence (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962). The definition of coalitions echoes that of William A. Gamson, 'A Theory of Coalition Formation', *American Sociological Review* (1961): 374; see also William A. Gamson, 'An experimental test of a theory of coalition formation', *American Sociological Review* (1961); William H. Riker, *Theory of Political Coalitions* (Greenwood Press, 1984).

¹²⁴ This term is derived from recent work on Yemen in which case study coalitions feature heavily, e.g. April Longley Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen', *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (2010).

¹²⁵ Conceivably, there is a ninth script, 'rejection or alteration of political goals'. This is not studied in this dissertation, as no examples were found. This, one suspects, is because rejecting political goals is what social scientists might refer to as a 'non-choice', that is an option that is explicitly kept off the table (James Jasper, 'A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social Movement Choices', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (2004): 10-11.). It is not discussed further because the terrorist organisations under study are so committed to their ambitions that the option of changing or discarding one's political goals is rarely addressed.

¹²⁶ For the purposes of this thesis, disengagement therefore refers to a "behavioural change, such as leaving a group or changing one's role within it ... [i]t does not necessitate a change in values or ideals, but requires relinquishing the objective of achieving change through violence. De-radicalisation, however, implies a cognitive shift – i.e., a fundamental change in understanding". (Fink and Hearne, 'Beyond Terrorism', 1.)

legitimacy. Equally, oppositions and rivals tend to be sceptical of the claim to non-violence and continue to tar former terrorist organisations as ‘terrorists’ rather than ‘politicians’ or ‘activists’.

Counter-Terrorist Scripts

Thus far, we have seen that, as new situations present themselves, System 1 enables the strategist to interpret the situation rapidly, to identify a range of options and, by envisaging the outcome of these options, to formulate an intuitive response. These responses are then appraised by System 2: where situations appear to be simple or stereotypical, intuitive responses are often approved outright; where situations are perceived to be complex or decisions seen to be misguided or unsuitable, the strategy may be modified or, less frequently, re-worked completely. It is worth highlighting two points here. In the first place, scripts provide accounts of how various players behave in particular situations, explaining how these sequences of events develop and what the outcomes of the interaction will be. From this perspective, scripts can usefully be thought of as stories about the future; they portray sets of characters interacting in a particular environment, they describe how these interactions unfold and how the plot ends. The second and related point is that if outcomes are to be reached as scripts describe, then all characters within the story must play their parts according to the script. The difficulty for strategists is that others often go their own way, failing to behave as the strategist anticipated. Outside the realm of stories exists an uncertain world, and scripts have to account for the unexpected by allowing for improvisation and flexibility. As Freedman puts it, for the strategist,

only one set of actions that can be anticipated with any degree of certainty, and that is the first move of the central player for whom the strategy has been devised. Whether the plot will unfold as intended will then depend on not only the acuity of the starting assumptions but also whether other players follow the script or deviate significantly from it.

In this sense, any study of terrorist decision-making must necessarily examine counter-terrorist scripts in order to explore how terrorist scripts, as statements of intent, compare to strategies as operationalised scripts. To be clear, this is not a study of counter-terrorist decision-making, which would require a dissertation of its own for a full study. It is, however, an attempt to introduce the scripts which are deployed by the governments under study – annihilation, attrition, repression, decapitation, disruption, bargaining, counter-extremism and de-radicalisation – and to explore the way in which they are intended to work.

Unlike terrorists, governments are rarely plagued by the eternal problem of insufficient means, although there may be considerable domestic pressure to use resources sparingly. Whilst, in this sense, political ambitions are likely to be more attainable because resources are readily available, they also likely to be highly complex: clearly, ending terrorism will feature as a main concern, but the maintenance of long-term alliances and popular support (and, doubtless, other priorities) will be key strands of political ambitions which will require strategies that navigate the peculiarities of each situation. The freedom to attend to ends rather than gather means is thrown into sharp relief by the two ‘military’ scripts – annihilation and attrition – which focus almost exclusively on bringing about ends.¹²⁷ Indeed, the primary purpose of annihilation as a response to terrorism is to crush a threat and in so doing, to send a message to other potential threats that particular behaviours will not be tolerated, but will be met by unrelenting responses.¹²⁸ This annihilation script, which is discussed only tangentially because it does not feature in the countries under study, carries risks with it: because it focuses on achieving ends whatever the costs, it can often result in collateral damage which subsequently confers legitimacy on the terrorist target and contributes to recruitment or mobilises other parties. This not only makes it more difficult to defeat the (now stronger) terrorist organisation, but also reduces the means, in particular the political will, to do so. When the annihilation script fails in this way, it often shifts,

¹²⁷ Others have seen three models of counter-terrorist responses. The war model describes the process of identifying an emerging threat and subsequently eliminating it before that threat can cause (further) harm to the interests of the state. The criminal justice model, by contrast, is the reactive attempt, normally by the police, to collect evidence and to bring terrorists to justice in the criminal system. Crelinsten usefully characterises the differences between the models, saying that the former follows the ‘rules of war’ where the latter respects the ‘rule of law’ (cited in Ami Pedahzur and Magnus Ranstorp, ‘A Tertiary Model for Countering Terrorism in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Israel’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 2 (2001): 3.). Pedahzur and Ranstorp have identified a third, ‘expanded criminal justice model, in which terrorist violence is seen neither as an act of war nor an ordinary crime; rather it is an exceptional phenomenon that occupies a grey area to which the state must respond in an equally exceptional fashion – by providing special legislation (e.g. allowing detention and surveillance) and by tailoring resources and institutions specifically to deal with the threat. See Audrey Kurth Cronin, ‘Introduction,’ in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (Georgetown University Press, 2004), 6; see also Lindsay Clutterbuck, ‘Law Enforcement,’ in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (Georgetown University Press, 2004), 142-3. From the strategic point of view, all three models, including the expanded criminal justice model, are simultaneously coercive and deterrent – that is, they deter terrorist challenges to the *status quo* through coercive threats or action. As has been pointed out by others, they consist of two elements: punishment and denial. See John Gearson, ‘Deterring Conventional Terrorism: From Punishment to Denial and Resilience’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 1 (2012): 173; Caitlin Talmadge, ‘Deterring a Nuclear 9/11’, *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2007): 24-29; Daniel Whiteneck, ‘Deterring Terrorists: Thoughts on a Framework’, *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2005): 187-99; Robert Trager and Dessislava Zagorcheva, ‘Deterring Terrorism: It Can Be Done’, *International Security* 30, no. 3 (2006): 108.

¹²⁸ The literature on annihilation is substantial, but in the context of counter-terrorism see Thomas Hoyt, ‘Military Force,’ in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (Georgetown University Press, 2004).

imperceptibly, to a script of attrition. Indeed, attrition is rarely a deliberate choice of the counter-terrorist strategist simply because there is little rationale for a long-term war when political ambitions are an urgent priority. Rather, attrition is often the by-product of a counter-terrorism campaign that fails to crush a persistent terrorist threat and so rumbles on. Here, each party has minor victories – a successful terrorist attack here, an intelligence triumph there – but the ‘decisive battle’ never materialises.¹²⁹

Counter-terrorism scripts, in contrast to military scripts, were far more commonly deployed in the countries under examination. There is a range of scripts in this category, the most ends-focused of which is repression, which is essentially a form of annihilation conducted through law enforcement rather than military means. This script seeks to limit an opposition’s resources so ruthlessly that the tension between means and ends becomes untenable and the terrorist organisation must disengage. Like the military script of attrition, it is not without its problems, however; repression can be extremely successful in crushing an organisation, but it can also generate public antipathy and hostility. As Kurzman has noted, repression is ‘a double-edged sword: it can either squelch protest or incite it’.¹³⁰ The problem with repression as a script, like annihilation as a script, is that it is so focused on ends that it risks subjecting ‘inner’ audiences (friends, allies and supporters) to its negative impacts and drives them to react adversely.

Another script which attacks the means of terrorist oppositions is decapitation. There are two ways in which this script can function: decapitation by targeted killing, increasingly though not exclusively through drone strikes, is envisaged as a way of dealing an organisation a *coup de grâce* by removing key figures, leaving middle and lower ranks without a leader to drive the now floundering organisation forward. Decapitation through capture or arrest is similarly an attempt to deprive an organisation of its most influential or skilled players and, in so doing, divest it of means.¹³¹ Decapitation has its advantages: attacks throw an organisation into disarray and ‘to avoid elimination, the terrorists must constantly change locations, keep those locations secret, and keep their heads down, all of which reduces the flow of information in

¹²⁹ Delbrück, by contrast, saw attrition and annihilation at opposite ends of a spectrum. See Craig, 'Delbrück: The Military Historian.' Hoyt, 'Military Force.'; Freedman, *Strategy: A History*.

¹³⁰ Charles Kurzman, 'The Qum Protests and the Coming of the Iranian Revolution, 1975 and 1978', *Social Science History* 27, no. 3 (2003): 312. See also Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 67.

¹³¹ Jenna Jordan, 'When Heads Roll: Assessing The Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation', *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009); Bryan C. Price, 'Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism', *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012); Patrick B. Johnston, 'Does Decapitation Work?: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns', *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012).

their organization and makes internal communications problematic and dangerous'.¹³² But the script necessarily entails risks. In the first place, strikes can kill civilians, as they did in Yemen, and turn previously supportive (or at least not hostile) local populations against the targeters, providing terrorists with precisely what they sought: increased political support. Even more broadly, because decapitation by killing will, one suspects, always be 'distasteful, immoral, and illegal' to many, the decapitation script invariably risks the loss of some domestic political support.¹³³

If decapitation is risky, then the disruption script is a safer bet. Once again, the script focuses on reducing the means available to terrorists by arresting their personnel, interdicting financial networks and preventing or reducing access to military capabilities. This script attempts to mitigate the problem of the loss of support posed by repression and decapitation by treating terrorism as an offence to be dealt with in the criminal justice process. That is not to say that it is not a resource-heavy script. Although it is less likely to alienate one's own support base so substantially that they support one's opposition, it is costly in terms of financial and human resources. The process of identifying particular groups of individuals, their role in a movement and their intentions is time-consuming, painstaking and financially expensive. In addition, significant changes to the law – in the form of emergency powers or particularly authoritarian legislation – can result in de-legitimation of governments, particularly where there is vociferous public debate over the erosion of civil liberties.

Kinetic scripts essentially focus on achieving political ends by limiting, reducing or removing terrorist resources and widening the gap between means and ends. In this sense, they are coercive strategies which attempt to force terrorist oppositions to give up campaigns of violence by playing on the inherent weakness of the opposition, their resources. Non-kinetic scripts, by contrast, are strategies of control rather than coercion. Prior to 9/11, the primary non-kinetic script was 'bargaining'. Unlike means-limiting kinetic scripts, bargaining was a 'strategy-limiter'. Under this script, negotiations were held with terrorists in which particular inducements were offered in return for a change in behaviour, specifically, the rejection of violence. In this sense, rewards were offered to sweeten the bitter pill of co-operation and to ensure that particular strategies for achieving political ends were rejected; equally, punishments were threatened if the rules of the game were violated. Nevertheless, bargaining was often politically difficult. Detractors argued that 'democracies must never give in to violence, and terrorists must never be rewarded for using it,' and that 'negotiations give

¹³² Daniel Byman, 'Do Targeted Killings Work', *Foreign Affairs* 85 (2006): 104.

¹³³ Stephanie Carvin, 'The Trouble with Targeted Killing', *Security Studies* 21, no. 3 (2012): 536.

legitimacy to terrorists and their methods and undermine actors who have pursued political change through peaceful means'.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the detractors argued, if other terrorists see that rewards are provided to those who resort to violence, they are likely to copy the logic of terrorism in order to seek particular concessions; terrorism will increase and security will disintegrate. Indeed, it was precisely because of this that governments widely adopted the now standard stance: 'no negotiations with terrorists, no deals with them and no concessions to them'.¹³⁵

In the aftermath of 9/11, when coercive and deterrent counter-terrorism strategies were perceived to have spectacularly failed and negotiation was out of the question, policy-makers and intelligence officials began to explore a range of other non-kinetic scripts. In this sense, the formal establishment of counter-extremism and de-radicalisation strategies represented a substantial shift in counter-terrorism paradigms. Counter-extremism, as a broad strategy, seeks to limit an opposition's resources by reducing its political support base. For the most part, this is to take the conflict into the ideological sphere; by challenging an opposition's political goals and violent strategies on ethical grounds, the aim is to reduce the size of the 'inner-directed' audience. At home, this is normally conducted through education, increasing community resilience and what can only be termed propaganda.¹³⁶ Countering extremism abroad focuses not on ideology but on the economic and social factors that are seen to drive

¹³⁴ Peter Neumann, 'Negotiating with Terrorists', *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 1 (2007): 128.

¹³⁵ Academics have argued along the same lines, see Carolin Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence* (Routledge, 2010). 3. Nevertheless, as Lapan and Sandler have argued, it is difficult to maintain the 'no negotiation' position: 'reputation effects may not be sufficient for a government to maintain a policy of never negotiating with hostage-taking terrorists owing to public opinion considerations'. Lapan and Sandler, 'To Bargain or Not To Bargain: That Is The Question', 16. See also Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*: 301. More broadly, the decision not to negotiate may also confer legitimacy on one's opposition by 'strengthening the argument that the only way to get the attention of the state is to commit increasingly violent acts'. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 141. The question of 'to bargain or not to bargain' therefore puts counter-terrorist strategists in a double-bind: either way – by talking or refusing to talk to the opposition – legitimacy is conferred on the opposition's claims. It is precisely because of this double bind that bargaining is rarely willingly adopted by counter-terrorist strategists. Negotiations may work in the short-term, particularly when, as Lapan and Sandler have shown, groups are losing resources, but there is little guarantee that they will secure the state in the longer term.

¹³⁶ The UK's *Prevent* strategy, for example, is deeply ideological; it states that among its priorities are 'challenging ideology and disrupting the ability of terrorists to promote it', 'better communication of Government security and foreign policies to rebut claims made about them', and the creation of programmes in 'education, communities and the criminal justice system to enable understanding of and challenge to terrorist ideology'. Home Office, 'Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy,' (London: The Stationery Office, 2006), 41f; see also Home Office, 'The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism,' ed. Home Office (London: The Stationery Office, 2009); Home Office, 'CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism,' (London: The Stationery Office, 2011).

extremism, and is, as such, the domain of development and financial aid.¹³⁷ The point here is that counter-extremism – whether through ideological challenge or humanitarian aid – is a fundamentally preventative strategy. As Freedman has pointed out, preventative strategies are ‘cold-blooded’ because ‘they assume that, given the opportunity, an adversary will use force and therefore cannot be afforded the option in the first place’.¹³⁸ In the realm of terrorists and counter-terrorists, preventative strategies are means-focused; they function by removing or severely limiting an opposition’s capabilities before they have acquired a position of strength from which they would present a substantial threat. They are, therefore, not strategies of coercion but of control: by further limiting terrorist resources, they force it to concentrate on acquiring means rather than pursuing ends through violence.

The ‘de-radicalisation’ script envisages persuading members of the opposition – whether high-profile leaders or marginal supporters – to renounce the methods and views of their organisation. The logic is threefold. In the first instance, by removing players from the opposition, it strikes a blow against their resources; in the second, like counter-extremism, individuals can be brought ‘into the fold’ and bolster the means of the strategist’s own side; in the third place, once de-radicalisation has been achieved, it is possible to then utilise senior leaders as ideological challengers against the opposition. By turning leaders, there is a possibility of redeploying their former organisational status and kudos in an attempt to de-radicalise other members of the organisation. It is difficult to define what type of a script de-radicalisation is: in some respects, it is preventative, particularly when it involves interventions on fringe supporters before they are fully enmeshed in the opposition or when leaders are deployed against their own organisation; in other respects, it is pre-emptive, particularly when it involves prison-based initiatives on those who have been caught in the planning stages of an act of terror. Either way, it is decidedly not a deterrent or coercive script, but a controlling one. Like counter-extremism, it seeks to remove the choices available to an underdog, in particular whether to use violence or not, by severely restricting its capabilities.

¹³⁷ Ngairé Woods, ‘Reconciling Effective Aid and Global Security: Implications for the Emerging International Development Architecture,’ *Global Economic Governance Programme* (University College, Oxford 2005); Frances Stewart, ‘Development and Security,’ *Conflict, Security & Development* 4, no. 3 (2004); Mark Duffield, ‘Human security: linking development and security in an age of terror,’ *New Interfaces between Security and Development* (2006); Jo Beall, Thomas Goodfellow, and James Putzel, ‘Introductory Article: on the Discourse of Terrorism, Security and Development,’ *Journal of International Development* 18, no. 1 (2006).

¹³⁸ Lawrence Freedman, ‘Prevention, Not Preemption,’ *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2003): 20.

Methodology

Having outlined the theory of terrorist decision-making under scrutiny in the dissertation, this section explains how that theory will be tested in practice. It begins by posing the research questions which this study attempts to answer as well as outlining the major aims of the research. The second section provides the reasons for selecting the case study countries and the third explains the rationale for examining violent Islamist movements. The final section of this chapter examines the way in which primary data has been collected.

Research Questions

This study asks three principal research questions: (a.) how do the organisations under study formulate their strategies, (b.) how do they envisage their strategies achieving political goals, and (c.) how are these strategies implemented in practice? In answering these questions, the study's primary aim is to establish the existence of the eight scripts described above in the decision-making processes of violent Islamist movements in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The second aim is to understand how these strategic scripts are intended to work by examining the publications of the groups under study. Thirdly, the study aims to describe how these strategic visions are implemented in practice; this will necessarily involve providing an in-depth study of the strategic behaviour of the movements under investigation. Fourthly, the research aims to establish the existence of a 'strategic gap' between the way in which scripts envisage sequences of actions unfolding in theory and the way in which they develop in practice and to explain this strategic gap as a consequence of fallacies in strategic scripts. Fifthly, the research will propose that because strategic scripts tell compelling stories about how situations should evolve, strategists remain blind to their inherent fallacies; this phenomenon will be referred to as 'narrative delusion'. Ultimately, the research aims to provide a theory of strategic decision-making and to test that theory on a range of violent Islamist groups.

Selection of Countries

In order to limit the relatively broad questions outlined above, it was necessary to build certain parameters into the research. One way was to confine the study to a limited number of countries: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Originally, Kuwait was included as a fourth country, but it was discarded relatively early on in the project in order to limit the scope of the research still further. Egypt, as the ideological centre of Islamist thought for much of the 20th Century, has played a central role in the growth of violent Islamism. The Muslim Brotherhood

was, as Kepel puts it, 'the prototype' of the contemporary Islamist movement and, as we shall see, laid the strategic foundations for the threats now posed by al-Qa'ida.¹³⁹ The emergence and expansion of larger violent Islamist groups such as *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (EIG) and *al-Jihad al-Islami al-Masri* (EIJ) – as well as lesser known organisations such as *Takfir w'al-Hijra* and the Military Academy Group – provides fertile territory for analysing the shifting strategies of violent Islamism and for exploring the way in which their strategies are designed to bring about political goals. The breadth and longevity of these violent Islamist groups is usefully complemented by the wide range of kinetic and non-kinetic strategies deployed by the Egyptian regime to counter their emergence and escalation.

Bearing this in mind, the second chapter examines the growth of violent Islamism in Egypt from the Muslim Brotherhood's creation of the Secret Apparatus to the rise of the EIG and the EIJ. The first section of the chapter analyses the emergence of multiple strategies for achieving violent Islamist political ends and the scripts which were envisaged to be at work. The second half approaches the move *from* violence on a thematic level. It examines the impact of government repression and mass arrests as well as analysing the potential effects of counter-extremism and de-radicalisation initiatives. The second half of the chapter pays particular attention to the EIG's renunciation of violence in the late 1990s as an example of 'demobilisation' and explores the way in which the script was intended to work by examining the corpus of revisionist literature produced by the EIG. Particular attention is also paid to the withdrawal, albeit for different strategic reasons, of the EIJ.

Saudi Arabia, addressed in the third chapter, represents an equally important case study because of its religious significance and position in violent Islamist thought. Although there is ample scope for a full study, because of the limitations of space, the research focuses solely on the growth of violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia between 1998 and 2007, that is to say the period in which al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) emerged, escalated and declined. The chapter examines AQAP's strategic visions and how these were implemented in practice; it explores the forceful and effective counter-terrorist campaign deployed by the Saudi government against the movement in addition to its 'softer' counter-extremist programme for imprisoned members of the organisation.

¹³⁹ Gilles Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam* (Saqi Books Publishers, 2005). See also Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh, With a New Preface for 2003* (University of California Press, 2003).

Yemen, discussed in the fourth chapter, is the most contemporary and unexamined of the case studies.¹⁴⁰ This chapter focuses on the oft-cited merger of AQAP's Saudi and Yemeni chapters and the move to multiple strategies of violence in 2009, as well as on the development of the 'grassroots *jihad*' in mid-2010. Similarly, the rise of violent Islamism from the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army to AQAP and *Ansar al-Shari'a*, provides fertile territory for analysing the way in which violent Islamists improvise upon existing strategic scripts and present governments both at home and abroad with new strategic conundra to which they must respond. Moreover, the fact that the Yemeni regime has deployed a range of military, counter-terrorist and counter-extremist strategies, in addition to the added responses of the West in the form of development and drone strikes presents a useful opportunity for examining the impact of a range of strategies (national, regional and international) on violent Islamist movements.

Definitions

As yet, little has been said about the terminology adopted in this research. For the purposes of this study I primarily refer to the organisations examined as violent Islamist. The rationale for adopting this term was twofold. In the first place, it simultaneously encapsulates a set of political ambitions and the way in which the organisations under study seek to achieve those ambitions without conveying any sense of moral judgment. This neatly coincides with the definition of the strategy as a way of converting resources into political ambitions. In the second and more practical place, 'violent Islamist' was more clearly defined and demarcated than other terms, allowing for clarity and simplicity in its usage throughout the study. By contrast, the rival terms which are widely used in the secondary literature and over whose relative merits much ink has been spilled were either inherently pejorative or ambiguous. 'Fundamentalist', for example, carries with it an image of backwardness implying that these organisations have failed to appreciate the perceived advantages of modernity and democracy. 'Extremist' fares little better, encapsulating a variety of behaviours and beliefs perceived to be unacceptable and located beyond the boundaries of legitimacy.¹⁴¹ Aside from

¹⁴⁰ At the time of writing, there are no in-depth studies of the long history of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), or of the interconnections with other violent Islamist groups that have emerged and declined in the past three decades.

¹⁴¹ The same is true in Arabic. The word for extremism in Arabic, *tatarruf* comes from the root *tā-rā-fā*, 'to be on the extreme side, hold an extreme viewpoint or position, to go to extremes, be radical, have radical views' and the noun (*taraff*) refers to an outermost point, a fringe or limit and even comes to mean the tip of the tongue. Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Spoken Language Services, 1993).

the fact that the term has become intimately associated with Islamic terrorism, it also carries with it a sense of illegitimacy and immorality that lends it an uncomfortable political slant.¹⁴²

The most commonly used term in the context of Islamist terrorism is '*jihadi*' (or '*jihadist*'). This term has been now widely been deployed when referring to those individuals and groups whose politico-religious beliefs fall under the broad mantle of Islamism, but whose method for bringing about the *Dar al-Islam* (the Islamic Society) is violence. But despite these perceptions, *jihad* does not always entail violence.¹⁴³ The central meaning of *jihad* is 'to strive' or 'to struggle', and in a religious context, it incorporates 'any form of activity, either personal or communal, undertaken by Muslims in attempting to follow the path of God'.¹⁴⁴ It is precisely because the term conflates normal religious activity of many conservative Muslims with the political violence of the few that the term is avoided in this thesis.¹⁴⁵ *Salafi* has, like *jihadi*, come into usage to designate those individuals who base their religious behaviour on a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and the *hadith*.¹⁴⁶ In contrast to *jihadi*, *Salafi* presents difficulties because it represents too broad a constituency.¹⁴⁷ Non-violent political parties, violent terrorist organisations, Saudi dissidents and supporters of the regime – all seem to fall

¹⁴² Malik suggests: '[Extremism is] increasingly used to include non-violent groups who support ideas about political organization (e.g. the idea of the caliphate) or social and personal life (e.g. gender equality norms) that are deemed to be incompatible with liberal democracy... However the precise criteria for identifying who is a 'Muslim extremist' remain surprisingly undertheorised'. Maleiha Malik, 'Engaging with Extremists', *International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2008). Robert Lambert, 'Salafi and Islamist Londoners: Stigmatised minority faith communities countering al-Qaida', *Crime, Law and Social Change* 50, no. 1 (2008); Basia Spalek and Robert Lambert, 'Muslim communities, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation: A critically reflective approach to engagement', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 36, no. 4 (2008); Munira Mirza, Abi Senthilkumaran, and Zein Ja'far, *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism* (Policy Exchange, 2007).

¹⁴³ For some, *jihad* has a violent element which is either defensive in nature, when required to protect Muslim territory from invasion, or offensive, to spread the word of Islam. See Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 2 (2005): 83-6.

¹⁴⁴ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 1. See also Antoine Sfeir, *The Columbia World Dictionary of Islamism* (Columbia University Press, 2007). 182f; David Cook, 'Jihad and Martyrdom in Classical and Contemporary Islam,' in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Blackwell, 2011).

¹⁴⁵ Hegghammer phrases the difficulties of its use in an academic environment neatly; "While Western academics (and liberal Muslim writers) use the term descriptively, mostly as a synonym for "violent Islamist", conservative Muslims see it as having normative implications that unfairly associate Islam with terrorism". Thomas Hegghammer, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism,' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Columbia University Press, 2009), 246.

¹⁴⁶ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). 219-22. Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁷ A point also made by Malik, 'Engaging with Extremists'. On three 'types' of Salafi – purists, politcos and *jihadis*, see Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'. On typologies based on targeting, see Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). ch.1.

under the banner of *Salafism*.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, it is because the term incorporates multiple and fluctuating identities, beliefs and ideologies that make it too unwieldy and slippery a term for this study.

In light of these problems and for the reasons suggested above, the research refers to the groups under study as violent Islamists. This is not, however, without its own problems because Islamism is a relatively broad term which encompasses a range of ideological perspectives.¹⁴⁹ Whilst the ideology of Islamism falls beyond the scope of this thesis, the critical fact is that as a term it encapsulates a relatively coherent set of political aims: the creation of a society which is Islamic in all aspects (politics, law, economics, civil society, education, foreign policy and so on), the establishment of an Islamic state and the implementation of *shari'ah*.¹⁵⁰ Because this thesis examines terrorism as a strategy for converting resources into political ambitions, similarity in political ends provides a useful way of identifying groups under study – that is, they have adopted violence in order to achieve the specific goals of an Islamic state, free of external influence and the related desire to run that state according to *shari'ah* and the precepts of the Qu'ran. Less frequently, the research refers to some of the organisations under study as terrorist. The briefest of glances at the secondary literature on the definition of terrorism will suggest that this is to play with fire.¹⁵¹ However,

¹⁴⁸ Hegghammer, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries.' See also, Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Madawi al-Rasheed, *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers* (London: C. Hurst, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ Hegghammer provides a more complex argument of five types of Islamist, depending on their orientation; it is a valuable argument, but one which tends to unwieldiness from over-compartmentalization, bearing in mind that many of the organisations he mentions fit into multiple categories. Hegghammer, 'Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries,' 244-65.

¹⁵⁰ This is a simplistic but effective definition based on that of Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2004). 58. Kepel echoes this definition in Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 4f. The ideology of Islamism is an enormous topic. On Egypt, see e.g. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2002); Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*; Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*; Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (I. B. Tauris, 1994); Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*; Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*; Wiktorowicz, 'A Genealogy of Radical Islam'; Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'. On Saudi Arabia, see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Thomas Hegghammer, 'Terrorist recruitment and radicalization in Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 4 (2006); Stéphane Lacroix and Thomas Hegghammer, *Saudi Arabia Background: Who are the Islamists* (Amman: International Crisis Group, 2004). On Yemen, see: Laurent Bonnefoy, 'Varieties of Islamism in Yemen: The logic of integration under pressure', *Middle East* 13, no. 1 (2009); Laurent Bonnefoy, 'How Transnational is Salafism in Yemen,' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Colombia University Press, 2009); Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁵¹ As Freedman puts it, the term 'terrorist' can be seen as 'as a form of political abuse to delegitimize a range of political claims and deny the possibility of serious dialogue' Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 315; see also Alex Schmid, 'Terrorism - The Definitional Problem', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 36(2004): 396; Brian Michael Jenkins, *The Study of Terrorism: Definitional Problems* (RAND, 1980). The problem, as both point out, is that 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' are inherently

the research only refers to groups as terrorist if they deploy terrorist violence as a strategy for achieving their goals and if that strategy coincides with the definition provided at the beginning of the theoretical section of this chapter.

Data Collection

Having set out the theory which underpins this research, it is necessary to describe how the research tests that theory. Bearing in mind the criticisms levelled at the field earlier in this chapter, it was decided early on that the study should be predicated on primary data. Two principal sources were identified. The first set of sources was derived from interviews with a range of diplomatic and security figures with first hand knowledge of violent Islamism in the countries under investigation. As the research progressed, this organically expanded to include some academics and analysts with particularly close ties to the countries under study. A period of fieldwork in all three countries was also planned, but various security and visa issues prevented travel to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Nearly six months of fieldwork were conducted in Egypt, and this also presented opportunities to interview now disengaged members of violent Islamist groups as well as individuals with close ties to those organisations.

At the beginning of the study, the researcher (perhaps naïvely) calculated that most participants would be happy to sign consent forms and, in so doing, to put the interview on a formal footing. This was a frustrating miscalculation: a number of senior members of Egyptian terrorist organisations simply put an end to meetings on being faced with ‘western spy tricks’. Intelligence officials from both the West and Middle East were equally chary about the process, although they were happier to go ‘off record’; this, sadly, meant that much insightful material was not admissible in the study. Over the course of the study, 32 formal interviews were conducted; in total, the researcher estimates that a further 15 or 20 informal discussions, often producing fascinating material, were also conducted. This was a substantial increase on the 25 interviews that were originally planned and, bearing in mind that the topics under investigation are sensitive and that those involved in both terrorism and counter-terrorism are understandably secretive, this was a pleasing outcome. Reassuringly, the non-admissible interviews did not yield anything substantially different to those which

value-laden and subjective. For two violently opposed portrayals, see the sharp moral contrast between Doris Lessing’s image of the ‘virtuous’ terrorist who ‘pulls down the shitty rubbish we live in’ (Doris Lessing, *The Good Terrorist* (Fourth Estate, 2013). 354.) and George Bush’s characterisation of al-Qa’ida as ‘the heirs of all the murderous ideologies ... follow[ing] in the path of fascism, and Nazism and totalitarianism’ (George Bush, ‘President Declares Freedom at War with Fear,’ (Washington 2001).)

were formal. At the beginning of the research, interviews were intended to be conducted in person; as the situation in Yemen grew steadily more unstable (to such an extent that the researcher was unable to obtain insurance for his fieldwork), it became clear that this was not possible. Skype and telephone interviews were therefore added into the project as alternatives and a number of interviews were conducted in this way.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the method for gathering data for several reasons. Questionnaires were considered to be better suited to large datasets comprising non-specialist audiences and seemed too rigid a form of inquiry which would only mask the content and depth of responses which the research required. Focus groups were a more tempting option because they allow for discussion, debate and the formation of opinion; however, bearing in mind the secretive nature of security communities and the related issues of access, it was felt that they would be near-impossible to set up. Semi-structured interviews were not simply chosen because of a lack of alternatives but for positive reasons, too: by their very nature, the researcher felt that they would enable new and unforeseen lines of inquiry to be pursued as they emerged in interview as well as allowing for the clarification of concepts, the unveiling of latent contradictions and paradoxes and for laying narrational emphasis on particular events and decisions.

Not that semi-structured interviews, particularly when conducted with 'knowledge elites', were without their problems. For the most part, these problems can be boiled down to the imbalance of power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee. In one interview, the participant insisted on interrogating the researcher as to his religious beliefs and subsequently launched into a monologue on the advantages of their own religious orientation. Other participants were clearly accustomed to interviews and developed a number of techniques for avoiding the issue or obfuscating their answers. Indeed throughout the research, participants frequently sought to assume the upper-hand throughout the interview: more often than not, they reframed questions as they saw fit or went off-topic to examine an unrelated problem or less relevant issue within the subject matter.

These issues were not unexpected. Indeed, it was precisely because of these issues that the researcher decided at the beginning of the study to supplement interview with other forms of primary data derived from desk research. This allowed the researcher to verify data acquired from interviews and, of course, to guide the interview questions in an iterative process. The most important items of material derived in this way were the publications of the groups under study, in both English and Arabic. This form of data collection presented its own ethical

issues: possession of material of a terrorist nature is illegal under English law and, at the very least, damning in the eyes of the intelligence services of the Middle East. In the case of the UK, the researcher made his intentions clear to senior members of the Metropolitan Police's Counter-Terrorism Command (SO15), but this was more a matter of reassurance than a formal process. The other problem with these publications was their availability; online magazines published before 2007/8 were virtually impossible to acquire unless they had become part of the *jihadi* canon. More recent publications, in particular of AQAP in Yemen, therefore dominate the research. Equally, English publications, though fewer in number than those in Arabic, also dominate the research because of the difficulties of translation: although the researcher attended a year of intensive Arabic at the beginning of the research, acquiring the level of fluency required to read lengthy and numerous Arabic publications, in which archaic or religious language is rife, was ambitious.

The final problem presented by these publications – which are, in essence, propaganda – was over credibility. Whilst violent Islamist authors, particularly those disseminating recruitment material, might portray their organisations as functioning in particular ways or as having particular goals, these can rarely be elevated beyond the status of 'claims' without verification. The problem is that verification is hard to come by: how does one authenticate a claim that, for example, the purpose of a particular act of violence was to provoke a target into over-reaction? Indeed, if violent Islamist propagandists are able to make false claims about the reality of attacks, in particular over the number of casualties, the identity of the perpetrators and *modus operandi* of an organisation, then these publications are decidedly unreliable. Bearing this in mind, the researcher decided to limit the use of violent Islamist publications solely to the analysis of an organisation's strategy and scripts. Here, it was felt, the analysis was on safer ground: violent Islamists have much at stake in disseminating a genuine version of their strategic vision, not least in ensuring that all parts of their organisation are working in unison towards shared goals.

The primary data was supported by large quantities of secondary data in the form of news articles, government press releases, non-academic reports and material from blogs and social media. Although there is a temptation to view this secondary material as more credible than primary sources, the research process revealed repeated problems in this assumption. Time and again, news reports conflicted over the details of terrorist attacks; government press releases were found to be wildly inaccurate (often as a consequence of the need to toe particular government lines or to address other issues in the political agenda); non-academic reports, blogs and social media varied widely in the quality of information and analysis. This is

far from a new situation: biases, inaccuracies, fabrications and falsehoods are all commonly encountered in the social sciences, and are best dealt with, as this study did, by exercising caution and maintaining a critical eye on all sources of information.

Chapter 2

Strategic Scripts in the Face of Repression: Violent Islamism and the Language of Dissent in Egypt

Egypt played a central part in the genesis and development of the violent Islamist movement: it was the environment in which the Muslim Brotherhood would be founded and in which it would toy with the concept and praxis of *jihad*. Lesser known organisations which emerged on the margins of the Islamist movement, such as *Takfir wal-Hijra* and the Military Academy Group, similarly resorted to terrorist violence as they sought to gain critical mass for their confrontation with the regime. Egypt was also the political landscape in which major organisations such as *Tanzim al-Jihad*, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) [*al-Jihad al-Islami*] and the Egyptian Islamic Group (EIG) [*al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*] waged campaigns of considerable violence. And it was here that ideologues such as Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Abd al-Salam Farag produced the texts that became widely received and perceived as foundational works which inspired and influenced violent Islamist groups for many years.

In light of its position in the trajectory of Islamism, it is not surprising that a good deal of scholarship has examined Egypt's Islamist movement, nor that much of this material focuses in particular on the factors and processes that drove Egyptian Islamist groups to adopt violence. For some, particularly political scientists and area specialists, socio-economic failure, ideological reassessment and western hegemony in post-colonial Egypt were central to the emergence of violence in Egypt.¹ For others, predominantly social movement theorists, regime constriction of avenues of political participation was the dominant factor in the production of Islamist violence.² Both sets of approaches provide valuable insights into the

¹ On socio-economic crisis and the violent Islamist movement in Egypt, see R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse University Press, 1994); James Toth, 'Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003); Mahmud A. Faksh, *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia* (Greenwood Press, 1997); Ali Dessouki, *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Lucien Vandenbroucke, 'Why Allah's Zealots? A Study of the Causes of Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt and Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Review* 16, no. 1 (1983); 'Cassandra', 'The Impending Crisis in Egypt', *The Middle East Journal* 49, no. 1 (1995). On the clash of cultures, see Ernest Gellner, *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists, Industrialization: The Southern Shore of the Mediterranean* (Walter de Gruyter, 1985); François Burgat, *L'islamisme au Maghreb: La voix du Sud* (Payot, 2008); Jacques Waardenburg, 'Islam as a Vehicle of Protest,' in *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists, Industrialization : The Southern Shore of the Mediterranean*, ed. Ernest Gellner (Amsterdam: Mouton, 1985); Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*; Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*; Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*; Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh*; Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*.

² See for example Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention.'; Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*; Munson, 'Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood';

social and political dimensions of violent Islamism. As yet, however, there are few studies which examine why violent Islamists selected (and eventually rejected) terrorism as a strategy and those analyses which are in circulation tend to focus mainly on ideological factors.³ In these studies, the decision to adopt terrorist violence – like the decision to reject it – is the product of shifting interpretations of ideology.⁴

In contrast to those studies which view ideological change as the precursor and driver of strategic change, one of the implications of the dual-process theory of decision-making is that script formation and strategic decision-making are necessarily preceded by a deliberative process which involves envisaging sequences of events, anticipating outcomes, and weighing up options. In this sense, ideology occupies a relatively insignificant role in *selecting* appropriate strategies, although it may play a greater part when it comes to persuading others that particular courses of action are suitable and should be adopted. The following chapter aims to apply the theory of strategic decision-making outlined in the previous chapter to a range of violent Islamist groups in Egypt. The chapter not only explores the way in which violent Islamist movements envisage their strategic scripts unfolding but also examines how these scripts work in practice, focusing on the impact and effects of terrorist violence as well as the responses of the Egyptian regime. In order to analyse the de-mobilisation script in detail, the chapter then proceeds to provide an extended examination of the EIG's non-violence initiative of the late 1990s and the EIJ's rejection of violence in the early 2000s; it investigates the strategic reasons for disengagement which underpinned the renunciation of violence and, in so doing, it seeks to relate it to the corpus of revisionist literature produced by the EIG, in particular. The chapter concludes by suggesting that there is a persistent disparity between Egyptian violent Islamist scripts, as stories about the future, and their strategies, as operationalised scripts.

Beinin and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*; Christine Sixta Rinehart, 'Volatile Breeding Grounds: The Radicalization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 11 (2009).

³ A point made by Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention.' See, for example, the work of Roel Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya,' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Columbia University Press, 2009); Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (W.W. Norton, 2004); Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad* (Hurst and Co., 2005); Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Harper Perennial, 2003).

⁴ See e.g. Gabriel Almond, Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (Yale University Press, 1990).

'Survival' and the Secret Apparatus

The foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood [*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*] by Hasan al-Banna in 1928 saw the emergence of a formal Islamist movement in the Middle East. At this stage, the Brotherhood was less a political enterprise and more a social and charitable organisation which sought to create an Islamic society through *da'awa* [preaching or, more literally, call (to God)]. By the late 1930s, however, the Brotherhood had transitioned from an essentially religious project with limited influence into a well-financed and increasingly political movement whose large membership straddled the full social spectrum.⁵ So rapid was its growth and extensive its influence that King Farouk began to see the Brotherhood as a potential threat and when Hasan al-Banna declared himself a candidate in the 1941 general elections, direct conflict between the Brotherhood and the Palace seemed a real possibility.⁶

In the event, both parties decided to co-operate, doubtless because they realised that an inevitable and mutually detrimental confrontation was looming. The deal brokered between Mustafa al-Nahhas, the Prime Minister, and al-Banna in the spring of 1942 brought welcome benefits to both parties: al-Banna agreed not to stand for election, taking some of the pressure off the regime, in return for the institution of legal measures against prostitution, restrictions on the sale of alcohol and freedom for the Brotherhood to operate throughout Egypt.⁷ Whilst each side kept to its bargain, both were happy to allow the other to do as they wished. But by the winter months of 1942, the British were becoming increasingly suspicious that the Brotherhood had pro-Nazi tendencies and were threatening Egypt's position of neutrality in the War.⁸ These suspicions were probably overinflated, but one British intelligence report from this period described a protest during which Brotherhood members chanted '[we] are all Axis soldiers, advance Rommel, down with Churchill'.⁹ For the British Ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson, this was a step too far and he ordered al-Nahhas to crack down on the spread of the *Ikhwan* across Egypt. al-Nahhas duly obeyed, retracting the legal measures against

⁵ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928-1942* (Ithaca Press, 2006). 256.

⁶ Indeed, the extent of their concern had been demonstrated only a few months earlier when the Palace had been forced to release a number of Brotherhood detainees from prison, in contravention of British demands, fearing 'a "religious revolution" if we keep these people interned'. This caused great consternation to the British Ambassador, who became convinced that the regime was trying to 'whitewash the Ikhwan in the eyes of the British'. Ibid., 266. See also Munson, 'Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood', 488; Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993). 27.

⁷ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 28-42; James Heyworth-Dunne, *Religious and Political Trends in Modern Egypt* (1950). 50.

⁸ Mark Huband, *Warriors Of The Prophet: The Struggle For Islam* (Basic Books, 1999). 84f.

⁹ Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*: 268.

prostitution and alcohol consumption, closed all the Brotherhood offices aside from the headquarters in Cairo and temporarily arrested al-Banna.

In response to the crackdown, which signalled the failure of the coalition, alternative strategic scripts were sought and found. In late 1942, al-Banna, fearing further regime aggression, created the Secret Apparatus [*al-Jihaz al-Sirri*] for the specific purpose of protecting the Society by waging defensive *jihad*. It is clear from an open letter of 1943 that from the outset al-Banna envisaged a particular situation in which the Secret Apparatus should be deployed:

Your message is yet unknown to many people, and when they know it and recognize its purposes, they will meet it with the severest opposition and the cruellest enmity. You will then be obliged to face numerous hardships and obstructions.... One government after another will obstruct you, and each of them will attempt to hinder your activity and block your progress. All the oppressors will exert every effort to restrain you and to extinguish the light of your message... This will lead you to the stage of trial, wherein you will be imprisoned, detained and banished; your property will be confiscated, your special activities stopped and your homes searched....

My Brothers: you are not a benevolent society, nor a political party, nor a local organization having limited purposes. Rather you are a new soul in the heart of this nation to give it life by means of the Qu'ran... If you are told that you are political, answer that Islam admits no such distinction. If you are accused of being revolutionaries, say "We are voices for right and for peace in which we dearly believe ... If you rise against us or stand in the path of our message, then we are permitted by God to defend ourselves against your injustice".¹⁰

al-Banna realised that the growth of the Brotherhood and increasing popularity of its message would present the regime with a threat to which it was likely to respond with repression and he accordingly furnished the Brotherhood with the resources (the Secret Apparatus) and the strategy (*jihad*) to protect itself. This defensive *jihad* was not only a way of removing obstacles to the Brotherhood's programme of *da'awa* and re-opening the political and social space that had been constricted by the regime, but also of ensuring the continued existence of the movement.¹¹ In this sense, al-Banna saw *jihad* as a defensive and reactive strategy which could ensure the continuation of the movement by rebuffing state intervention when it

¹⁰ The letter was titled *Risala bayn al-Ams w'al-Yawm* [Letter between Today and Yesterday] and can be found in Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 30.

¹¹ Indeed, this section of the letter was titled "Obstacles in our path". Ibid., 29.

threatened to destroy or substantially weaken the Brotherhood. *Jihad*, under this view, was about doing whatever it took to secure one's own survival.

Although al-Banna first activated the Secret Apparatus in late 1947 in response to the partition of Palestine, it was not until 1948 that it was put into action in Egypt – and when it was, it sparked a cycle of violence. The cycle began in January when a cache of weapons and explosives was discovered by police in the Muqattam Hills outside Cairo; a firefight ensued in which several were killed, the weapons confiscated by police and a number of Secret Apparatus members were temporarily arrested, only to be released after claiming that the weapons were for Palestine.¹² Later that year and reportedly on the orders of al-Banna himself, the Secret Apparatus assassinated Ahmed al-Khazinder Bey, a judge notorious for giving harsh sentences to Brotherhood members.¹³ When further caches of arms were found along with papers proving the existence of the hitherto unknown Secret Apparatus in the winter of 1948, the relationship between the Brotherhood and the Government disintegrated yet further.¹⁴ On the night of 8 December 1948, the Government attempted to put the confrontation to an end by confining all Brotherhood volunteers in Palestine to camp and dissolving the Society; the headquarters in Cairo were surrounded and, with the exception of al-Banna, all present were arrested. The Secret Apparatus responded to this just three weeks later by assassinating Mahmud al-Nuqraishi, the Prime Minister; six weeks after that, the regime responded in kind as Hasan al-Banna himself was gunned down in the street by the Secret Police.¹⁵

By limiting the Brotherhood's ability to disseminate their message through *da'awa*, denying them access to weaponry and dissolving the Society, the regime threatened the movement's continued existence. The Secret Apparatus responded with violence in what was essentially an intuitive reaction to the loss of resources and the threat of extinction; this defensive,

¹² Huband, *Warriors Of The Prophet: The Struggle For Islam*: 85; Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition* (Saqi Books, 2010). 29; Abd al-Fattah M. El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question 1928-1947* (I. B. Tauris, 1998). Mitchell notes somewhat dryly 'Arms gathering 'for the Arabs' and 'training', thus apparently vindicated, went on apace'. (Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 61.).

¹³ Ana Belen Soage and Jorge Fuentelsaz Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt,' in *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, ed. B. Rubin (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 40-1; Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 62.

¹⁴ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 61f; Soage and Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt,' 41. On al-Banna's fluctuating relationship with the Palace, see Huband, *Warriors Of The Prophet: The Struggle For Islam*: 84f.

¹⁵ The assassination is widely believed to have been ordered by King Farouk. See Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 29. also Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Barry Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*.

impulsive *jihad* was deployed in an effort to persuade the regime that the actual costs of repression (resulting, for example, in the assassination of high-profile political figures) were greater than the potential benefits (a far smaller, less political Islamist movement). In this sense, al-Banna recognised that, when vulnerable, violence is a useful strategy for ensuring survival; it can force an opposition to keep their distance and allow the strategist to get to a place of comparative safety in reasonable shape and from there, new options may emerge.

There was nothing new about this 'survival' script as it is termed in the remainder of this research. In the natural world, animals threatened by predators or rivals display an instinctive 'fight or flight' responses to ensure their survival. Nevertheless, it seems that at least part of the reason that the 'fight' script appealed can be found in the political landscape in which al-Banna and the Brotherhood operated. Here political violence was not only rife but widely perceived to be the best way of achieving an organisation's ambitions.¹⁶ The execution of the British Minister for the Middle East, Lord Moyne, by members of the Stern Gang in 1944, for example, was met not with the embittered contempt one might expect amongst Egyptian movements, but with grudging respect. As Gamal Abdel Nasser said at the time, 'here were men ready to die for their cause, who hold an example to us'.¹⁷ Indeed, it was an example which groups of diverse ideological persuasions took to heart: nationalist organisations attempted to amplify their political voice through violence; communist groups rose to notoriety in the final years of the Second World War with a series of attempted assassinations; and anti-colonialist groups similarly began to target British soldiers in order to force a British withdrawal.¹⁸ In a landscape of competing ideologies in which violence was the *mode du jour*, it seems reasonable to suggest that al-Banna modelled his script on the way in which others sought to achieve their political ambitions.

¹⁶ For a full discussion of political violence in Egypt in the 1940s, see Donald Reid, 'Political Assassination in Egypt, 1910-1954', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 4 (1982).

¹⁷ Ibid., 633.

¹⁸ In the final years of the war, Anwar al-Sadat was arrested for providing German spies living on a houseboat in Cairo with weapons to attack the British. Mohamed Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat* (Corgi, 1984). 17-26. Sadat also had close contact with the Muslim Brotherhood and may have provided them with materiel as a way of challenging the pro-British monarchy. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*: 11; Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*: 16. Similarly, Sadat's associate Husayn Tewfiq regularly attacked British soldiers in Ma'adi, before he was caught red-handed in an attempt on the Prime Minister in 1946. Reid, 'Political Assassination in Egypt, 1910-1954', 633. Also Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*: 24f. On the communist groups, see Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East* (Penguin, 2004). 135. On nationalists, see Reid, 'Political Assassination in Egypt, 1910-1954', 633f. In February 1945, one of their members (and a suspected Secret Apparatus operative) shot the Prime Minister, Ahmad Mahir Pasha.

Whatever the inspiration behind the script, there were clearly inadequacies in the formulation. al-Banna had underestimated the level of violence required to fend off the regime and had failed to anticipate the extent of the regime's counter-reprisals in response to the assassination of major political figures. In the event, violence simply provoked the Palace into responding in kind and the Secret Apparatus lost further members to counter-reprisals and arrest; the atmosphere of repression deepened; the Secret Apparatus responded with more high-profile assassinations and the Government with even more wide-ranging arrests and repression. This is one of the critical problems for embryonic movements when they come into direct confrontation with their regimes and when their survival hinges on the outcome of that confrontation. Essentially, as we shall see, there are two options: movements can fight the regime to force it to leave them alone or they can escape confrontation by going into hiding. Both strands of this 'fight or flight' script have difficulties. By fighting, violent Islamist movements often trigger a cycle of violence which depletes their already limited military, human and financial means both through attacks and regime offensives.¹⁹ By withdrawing, however, there are reputational effects: those in the movement committed to the logic of violence may follow another strategic script of their own or defect to a rival organisation *en masse*; supporters urging the leadership to act in pursuit of political goals are likely to be marginalised and lose faith in the movement and the leadership.

Although the Secret Apparatus' 'fight' strategy failed to reflect the script, the Brotherhood's primary goal – survival – was accomplished nonetheless, though this was the product of political necessity and luck rather than strategic intelligence. After the death of al-Banna, open confrontation between the Brotherhood and the regime dwindled and was replaced by a cautious, if hostile, truce. Despite the disparity between the 'fight' script and the realities of confrontation with the regime, this perceived success meant that al-Banna's strategic vision would be praised, emulated and, as its flaws became apparent, critiqued by violent Islamists in Egypt in years to come.

On the Fringes of the Brotherhood: Transitioning from the State of Weakness

On 23 July 1952, King Farouk was deposed by the Free Officers Movement in a coup which ushered in a period of cordial relations between the newly-installed regime and the Brotherhood.²⁰ Nasser recognised that his position was too precarious to risk direct confrontation with the largest organised religious force in Egypt and, although he sought to

¹⁹ Both points are made by Lapan and Sandler, 'Terrorism and signalling', 385.

²⁰ For a first-hand account, see Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*.

limit opposition by abolishing all political groups in January 1953, he made a special exception for the *Ikhwan* – even going so far as to offer ministerial posts to the Brothers in an attempt to bring them under his control.²¹ As Nasser consolidated his tentative hold on to power, the Brotherhood sought to cope with the death of al-Banna who even after his execution ‘remained, in full measure, the final and unqualified authority in the Society’.²² Under the fragile leadership of Hasan al-Hudaybi, a man far less able to instil loyalty than al-Banna, elements within the Brotherhood began to form their own ideas about how to achieve the Society’s political aims, namely the truly Islamic state governed according to the precepts of *shari’a*.

Sayyid Qutb and the Re-Interpretation of Ma’alim fil-Tariq: 1965 Organisation

The informal coalition between the regime and the Society came to an abrupt end in October 1954, when a member of the Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser. The attempt triggered a typically heavy-handed response from the regime, who summarily executed the movement’s leaders and arrested thousands of suspected Brothers.²³ Amongst those arrested was Sayyid Qutb and it was under the harsh conditions of the Tora prison in southern Cairo that he wrote his foundational texts to which contemporary violent Islamists would look for strategic and ideological guidance. In theory, Qutb, like al-Banna, considered violence in the form of *jihad* as a purely defensive strategy implemented to ‘repel aggression if it occurs’ as a consequence of the ‘inevitable confrontation’ with the regime.²⁴ A close analysis of *Ma’alim fil-Tariq* [Signposts], for example, reveals that violence is never mentioned *per se* and, as John Calvert has pointed out, ‘although Qutb spoke about the inevitability of conflict... nowhere in

²¹ Only Sheikh Hassan al-Baquri accepted. He was dismissed by the Guidance Council for taking a part in *jahili* politics. See Maye Kassem, *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule* (Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 2004). 138.

²² Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 296. Despite his mismanagement of the Secret Apparatus, al-Banna had a remarkable ability to inspire loyalty. One anecdote describes a follower saying ‘if Banna were to sneeze in Cairo, the Brothers in Aswan would say “Bless You”’. On the charisma of al-Banna, see Rinehart, ‘Volatile Breeding Grounds: The Radicalization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’. For an analysis of the ‘myth’ of al-Banna, see Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition*. On Hudaybi, see Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (Taylor & Francis, 2009).

²³ al-Hudaybi was also given the death sentence, but it was commuted to life imprisonment on the grounds that ‘perhaps he had fallen under the influence of those around him, a view supported by his bad health and age’. Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*: 160.

²⁴ John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (Columbia University Press, 2010). 242. See also Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 76 and n. 69, p.164 in particular; Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*: 29f; Nazih Ayubi, ‘The Political Revival of Islam: the Case of Egypt’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 4 (1980): 137-43.

his writings did he advocate the tactic of the Leninist-style coup that become the hallmark of some radical Islamist groups'.²⁵

In practice, however, Qutb did consider more aggressive scripts. In 1965, only a few months after he had been released from the Tora prison, Qutb began to meet with a group of Brothers which had coalesced around the material he had written whilst in prison.²⁶ The group, which came to be known as the 1965 Organisation, consisted primarily of younger, radical members of the Brotherhood and emerged as a distinct faction beyond the control of al-Hudaybi and the Guidance Council.²⁷ After Qutb's release from prison, this faction began to formulate alternative scripts and to re-interpret Qutb's works to support these strategic scripts. Although Qutb frequently urged restraint at these meetings, pointing to the ordeals of 1954 and 1949, his own vision of a defensive *jihad* increasingly became one of aggression and other strategic options – such as assassinating Nasser in revenge for his treatment of the Brotherhood in 1954, killing the Prime Minister and directors of the intelligence services or attacking electricity substations to cause panic and confusion – began to be discussed.²⁸ Attacks on infrastructure were discarded early on because 'such attacks would weaken Egypt's economy and play to the advantage of Israel, the[ir] implacable enemy'; nevertheless, the attraction of political assassination remained and Qutb asked the organisation to step up the pace of their training.²⁹

Qutb's original script was purely defensive – it was designed solely 'to deal immediate defensive, preventative and retaliative blows against the government if it moved to crush the organization' – and thus exactly mirrored al-Banna's 'fight' script.³⁰ Increasingly, however, Qutb began to see this defensive script in ever more offensive terms; it became a way of bridging the gap between the Brotherhood's meagre means and their ambitious ends by confronting the state and mobilising the by now fragile Islamist movement. In the event, the

²⁵ This work is also called 'Milestones' and 'Signs along the Way'. Ayubi, 'The Political Revival of Islam: the Case of Egypt'. The quotation is from Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*: 259. and

²⁶ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*: 29; Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*: 416f. points out that Qutb had succeeded in disseminating early drafts of *Signposts* in the form of letters. Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 76. points out that the work had been formally authorized by al-Hudaybi.

²⁷ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 76. cf. Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*. She refers to it as Organisation 1965 and suggests that al-Hudaybi knew about, if not encouraged, its existence.

²⁸ Interview with former Egyptian violent Islamist 2, Cairo, 14th June 2011. This is supported by Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*: 242.

²⁹ Ibid., 243.

³⁰ Ibid., 239.

group was unable to realise any of these visions, defensive or offensive: in late July, Qutb's brother, Muhammad, although completely uninvolved in the 1965 Organisation or, indeed the Brotherhood, was arrested. For Qutb, this was an effort to put personal pressure on him and he reportedly remarked that 'the forces of the state feel the presence of the organization, but they lack meaningful information about it. So they strike hoping to find a thread that will lead them to the organization'.³¹ And a thread they found: as information about the 1965 Organisation came to light, the regime response was typically uncompromising. Thousands were detained and police brutality was rife; as John Waterbury puts it, 'the basic rule in those days was that if you were found guilty, you went to prison; if you were found innocent, you went to the concentration camp'.³² Indeed, in the 1966 trial, mere possession of *Ma'alim fil-Tariq* was enough to secure a conviction and the prosecution produced, in the words of Sivan, 'a whole dossier – a veritable *explication de texte* – which ... was to serve as a linchpin for the act of accusation and of the prosecutors' speeches'.³³

In August 1966, Sayyid Qutb and the leadership of the 1965 Organisation were sentenced to death: the loss of the ideologue and the harshness of the crackdown all but destroyed the Brotherhood and in the years that followed it barely functioned. Nevertheless, the failures of the Secret Apparatus and the 1965 Organisation provided valuable lessons from which other Islamist groups would learn. With these examples clearly in mind, these groups recognised the inherent difficulties in trying to achieve political ends from what they would call a 'state of weakness' [*marhalat al-istid'af*]. Rather than resorting to impulsive acts of revenge, these organisations began to focus on what became the central problem of violent Islamist movements: how to transition from a state of weakness to a state of power.

Out of the 'State of Weakness': Takfir wal-Hijra and the Military Academy Group

Our foremost objective is to change the *jahili* system at its very roots – this system which is fundamentally at variance with Islam and which, with the help of force and oppression is keeping us from living the sort of life which is demanded by our creator. Our first step will be to remove ourselves from the *jahili* society and all its values and concepts.³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 248. Nasser claimed that a huge plot had been found; in reality, it is likely that he was attempting to galvanise public support in the wake of a stream of foreign and domestic policy disasters, see Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 31.

³² Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 32f; John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton University Press, 1992). 340.

³³ Sivan, *Radical Islam*: 27; Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*: 419. Four of the younger members, Sabri Arfa, Ahmad Abd al-Majid, Majdi Abd al-Aziz and Ali Ashmawi had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

³⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Islamic Book Service, 1964 (tr. 2006)). 21.

Thus Sayyid Qutb described his vision for achieving the pure Islamic society in *Milestones*. The problem with this vision was that, once again, there was substantial disagreement in the Islamist movement over strategy. This was manifest in an ideological debate about the meaning of *jahiliyya*. The old guard interpreted the term with reference to its less evocative origins (*juhl*) which best translates as 'foolishness'.³⁵ They argued that *jahiliyya* referred to human flaws and imperfections which should be remedied through *da'awa* [discourse or preaching]. To the younger Islamists on the fringes of the Brotherhood, often labelled neo-Islamists or neo-Brethren, *jahiliyya* was an inherent condition of the un-Islamic state, marked specifically by the absence of *shari'ah* and the failure to resort to the Qu'ran and *hadith* to inform decisions in all areas of public and private life. The neo-Brethren argued that the only way to achieve the truly Islamic state was withdrawal [*mufasala*] from society.³⁶

On the fringes of the Brotherhood, as it fractured into multiple competing cliques in the early 1970s, emerged a group who took withdrawal from the *jahili* state very seriously. The organisation called itself the Society of Muslims, but the media referred to it as *Takfir w'al-Hijra* [Excommunication and Flight], neatly acknowledging the two stages in their strategic vision. Under the leadership of Shukri Mustafa, who had been imprisoned for six years in the 1965 round-up of the Brotherhood's members, the organisation swelled.³⁷ Shukri demanded complete withdrawal from *jahili* society in order to establish a pure Islamic counter-society. After the arrest of some of his members in 1973, Shukri put this vision into practice. He excommunicated the regime on grounds of apostasy (*takfir*) and, accompanied by a number of followers, promptly departed from Cairo to camp out in caves in the mountains for several months. Even on their return from the mountains in 1974, the group remained withdrawn from society, sharing a number of furnished flats in Cairo's impoverished suburbs of Shubra and Imbaba.³⁸

³⁵ On the broader concept of *jahiliyya* in Qutb, see William Shepard, 'Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine of Jahiliyya', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 04 (2003). On *juhl* in the work of al-Hudaybi see Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*: 422.

³⁶ Interview with 'Musa' (senior Egyptian political adviser), Cairo, 30th January 2012.

³⁷ Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays*: 19, suggests there was a substantial membership. "Between three and five thousand active members", notes Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Egypt's Islamic Militants', *MERIP Reports*, no. 103 (1982): 5; Jeffrey B. Cozzens, 'Al-Takfir wa'l Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 494 suggests that there were 4000 members. On the structure of the organisation, in particular, the messianic image of Shukri Mustafa, see Ayubi, 'The Political Revival of Islam: the Case of Egypt', 79.

³⁸ On the organisation's ideology, see Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 78. Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays*: 22. Ibrahim, 'Egypt's Islamic Militants', 6f. David Zeidan, 'Radical Islam in Egypt: a comparison of two groups', *Middle East* 3, no. 3 (1999): 3f. Cozzens, 'Al-Takfir wa'l Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma', 493f.

In October 1976, after avoiding the attention of the authorities with some success and gaining a considerable following in the process, a handful of Shukri's followers absconded to a rival organisation. He ordered the defectors to be punished, but the reprisals inadvertently caught the attention of the police who stepped in and arrested dozens of his confederates.³⁹ While police intervention was damaging, the subsequent media attention was of greater concern: a number of articles were written, probably on the government's instruction, in which the Society was characterised as a group of crazed religious oddballs.⁴⁰ In early 1977, the Society responded to the media campaign by kidnapping Muhammed al-Dhahabi, former minister of *waqf* [religious endowments] in an effort to raise their profile, challenge the propaganda campaign and coerce the Government into acceding to their demands (which included releasing their imprisoned Brothers, retracting the 'deceitful stories' in the daily newspapers and delivering 200,000LE).⁴¹ The Government was intransigent, and a few days later, Shukri ordered the execution of al-Dhahabi, to which the Government responded as it always had done to Islamist violence – with extreme repression.⁴² Within days, the entire leadership and the vast majority of the membership had been arrested and, after a rapid trial, five were sentenced to death, Shukri among them.

In the beginning and despite the fact that they were not under immediate threat from the regime, Shukri's strategic vision was based on the fact that the movement was vulnerable and that greater resources needed to be acquired if they were to resist challenges from the regime. For Shukri, then, the crucial problem for violent Islamists was in transitioning from what he termed the 'state of weakness' [*marhalat al-istid'af*] to a 'phase of power' [*marhalat al-tamakkun*]. He explained that

power, like everything else, has degrees. This phase begins, in my view, when the circle of oppression and weakness is broken; it then progresses to conquest and expansion. There is no doubt that when the Muslims made the *hegira* from Mecca to Medina, they were already at the first stage of the phase of power since no one could impose anything on them any longer.⁴³

³⁹ This was one among many examples of power play which I do not examine, largely because details of the defections and reprisals are scant.

⁴⁰ A number of spurious claims were made, amongst them Shukri's *droit de seigneur*. Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 89.

⁴¹ al-Dhahabi had recently written an article on the Society that was less than favourable. On the demands (which were extensive), see *ibid.*, 92. Cozzens, 'Al-Takfir wa'l Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma', 493.

⁴² Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 99. notes that some Islamists claim he was murdered by the police, though no evidence has emerged to confirm this.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 83.

The central problem of getting to the 'phase of strength' was at the core of Shukri's strategic calculations and drove much of his vision. In this sense, Shukri's Society of Muslims sits in sharp contrast to the Secret Apparatus which was examined in the previous section. The latter had opted for the 'fight' strand of the 'survival' script in response to state repression, the former, by contrast, chose the 'flight' strand in order to gain sufficient strength to withstand potential regime intervention or to challenge the regime if circumstances allowed. So important was the acquisition of resources that the failures of Secret Apparatus and the 1965 Organisation, which Shukri attributed to their failure to cultivate and expand upon their resources, loomed large in his strategic calculations. 'I accuse these leaders of the Muslim Brethren...', Shukri reportedly said, 'who have led men to their doom, who have delivered them to the executioners, the gallows, the prisons, of high treason. They have ruined men's lives, toying with them irresponsibly'.⁴⁴

For Shukri, throwing away lives in the state of weakness was an act of treason; he recognised that resources were difficult to come by and should be nurtured and shepherded with diligence. Attempting to challenge the regime before 'critical mass' had been acquired, he reasoned, could only bring about the demise of Islamist oppositions. The police intervention of 1976 and subsequent media ridicule, however, changed the situation and Shukri was forced to find an alternative script. It was no longer enough to simply build up resources in an effort to attain the 'phase of strength'; significant quantities of personnel had been lost and, more importantly, the media had tarnished Shukri's standing amongst other Islamists. As the situation altered, so Shukri recognised the need for an alternative script which could restore the Society's reputation, reassert their Islamist credentials and reacquire some of the resources which had been lost. In the 'power play' script, as it is referred to in the remainder of the research, he essentially envisaged deploying violence to send a message that the organisation had sufficient resolve, capacity and ability to threaten its oppositions, satisfy potential supporters and outrank rivals.

At around the same time as the Society of Muslims was shifting from 'flight' to 'power play', another movement, which became known as the Military Academy Group, was founded on the margins of the Brotherhood by Salih Siriyya.⁴⁵ The two organisations quickly became rivals, not least because both aimed to recruit from a limited number of devout Islamists and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 92. In his trial, he went still further: 'The Society of Muslims is the first Islamic Movement to be founded in centuries. As for the Muslim Brethren, God did not grant them power and that is irrefutable proof that they were not a true and legitimate Islamic movement'.

⁴⁵ Ibrahim, 'Egypt's Islamic Militants'.

jealously guarded their members. The difference between the two organisations was entirely strategic, pivoting on the way in which their similar political goals could be brought about. Where Shukri believed all society to be *jahili* and preached *mufasala kamil* [complete separation], Siriyya and his supporters were convinced that only the regime was *jahili*.⁴⁶ As Kepel puts it, 'unlike Shukri, Siriyya created no counter-society and organized no *hijra* to Cairo's furnished flats. His disciples continued to lead normal lives so as not to attract the attention of the authorities'.⁴⁷ In April 1974, the group attempted to seize the Military Academy in Heliopolis, raid the armoury and kill Sadat as he drove by in his motorcade. The operation was a complete failure; the attackers were spotted by soldiers stationed at the Academy, killed in the ensuing shoot out and in the days that followed, the majority of the organisation were arrested and Siriyya was sentenced to death.⁴⁸

Although Siriyya's Military Academy Group withdrew not to the mountains but into society, they essentially acted upon the same 'flight' strand of the survival script as the Society of Muslims. They sought to avoid detection and, by keeping all members safe from state intervention, to increase their available means and reach critical mass. The 'flight' strategy was remarkably successful in achieving both organisations' short term ambitions – namely to avoid detection and to allow them to get to the next stage without being eliminated in the process. Although they were similar in selecting, if not in implementing, the 'flight' strand, both organisations diverged when they reached the next stage, evaluated their options and followed a new strategic script. *Takfir w'al-Hijra* adopted the 'power play' script in the face of arrests and a media smear campaign, deploying violence to signal their resolve, demonstrate their operational expertise and to repair reputational damage in an effort to cement their status as an Islamist movement. The Military Academy Group by contrast selected the mobilisation script; they saw Sadat as the final obstacle between a *jahili* and an Islamic state. In this sense, violence for the Military Academy Group was not about bringing publicity to the cause but about clearing the way for a popular, but decidedly religious, uprising. Neither strategy worked in practice: the kidnapping of Muhammed al-Dhahabi failed to coerce the regime to concede to Shukri's demands, leaving the organisation's reputation in tatters and its carefully gathered membership dead or dispersed; Siriyya's strategy failed on tactical grounds at the first stage, though it seems highly unlikely that the assassination of Sadat would have toppled the regime and paved the way for the Islamic state.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays*: 20f.

⁴⁷ Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 94-5.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 94-6.

⁴⁹ Particularly bearing in mind the fact that *Tanzim al-Jihad*, as we shall see in the next section, employed the same script. Although it was successful operationally, it was a strategic failure.

A large part of the problem for both Shukri and Siriyya was deciding when to change the focus from acquiring resources to pursuing ends or, to put the same problem a different way, how to judge when sufficient resources had been acquired. This 'use it or lose it' dilemma troubles most violent opposition movements: although there is a certain logic to gathering resources, eventually the need to attend to political goals will outweigh the benefits of recruitment, in particular when there is pressure from below to pursue objectives. There are numerous considerations over whether further resources actually can be acquired, whether sufficient resources have been found to proceed to the next stage, if not to long-term political ambitions, whether resources are of a magnitude comparable to both one's political ambitions and those of one's opposition, whether the only way to get further resources is to proceed to the next stage and hope that violence is (to echo Bakunin) the best way to spread principles. With so many factors, the possibilities for self-delusion, absurd optimism and 'bad mathematics' are seemingly endless. Time and again, as we shall see, violent Islamists devoted considerable energy to accruing political support and recruiting new personnel only to lose them by confronting the enemy before sufficient resources had been acquired.

Tanzim al-Jihad and the Hybridisation of Scripts

The first half of the 1970s had seen improved relations between the Islamist movement and the regime. In this amenable climate, significant numbers of violent Islamists were being released from jail as part of the presidential pardons in the aftermath of the 1973 war and government funds were being poured into Islamist student bodies on university campuses (known as the *jama'at Islamiyya* [Islamic Associations]).⁵⁰ But the violence of the Military Academy Group and the Society of Muslims in the mid 1970s irrevocably altered Sadat's perception of Islamists as potential allies. As he attempted to negotiate a peace deal with Israel, he became increasingly reluctant to expend political capital on organisations which fundamentally opposed him and he began the awkward process of unravelling his relationship with the Islamist movement. Despite the fact that the *jama'at* enjoyed a considerable popular following, he focused his efforts on university campuses, retracting the

⁵⁰ The *jama'at* are not to be confused with the singular *Gama'a*. The former were effectively student unions, who begun as non-violent groups advocating discursive *hisba* [best translated as commanding right and forbidding wrong] before progressing to a form of physical *hisba*, manifested as vigilantism. See Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya,' 195f; Ayubi, 'The Political Revival of Islam: the Case of Egypt', 75. See Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 134f. for an entertaining description of campus life. The Gama'a, by contrast, were a terrorist organisation on which much more can be found in the next section.

Islamic Associations' funding, re-structuring the General Union of Students and freezing its assets. In confronting the *jama'at*, Sadat achieved his short-term ambitions of limiting Islamist authority in the universities; but it did not take long for the *jama'at* to simply relocate and, in the process, fragment into myriad cliques and loose coalitions outside the campuses and beyond the control of the regime.⁵¹ As Heikal puts it:

Consciously or unconsciously, the régime seemed determined to put to the test Marx's dictum that religion is the opium of the people ... [this was] a rough and ready attempt to mask political and social problems beneath the *galabiyeh* and the *chador*. Other strains of fundamentalism were at work elsewhere, unseen and uncontrolled by the authorities. The régime and its backers were creating a monster, and one day, sooner probably than they expected, it was going to turn and rend them.⁵²

One organisation which emerged, inspired by Qutbian ideology and the call to *jihad*, from the dissolution of the *jama'at* was *Tanzim al-Jihad* [The *Jihad* Organisation]. The organisation had its roots in a number of Islamist 'clusters' in Cairo and Middle Egypt.⁵³ The leader of the Cairo branch, main ideologue and author of their central text, *al-Farida al-Gha'iba* [The Neglected Imperative], was an electrician named Abd al-Salam Farag.⁵⁴ His work focused on the strategic reasons for the failure of the Military Academy Group and the Society of Muslims and argued that the Islamist movement required a radical reassessment of its strategies if it was to

⁵¹ Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 154. It is worth noting that this is another example of the 'flight' strand of the survival script.

⁵² Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*: 134-35.

⁵³ It is worth noting in passing that these two loosely formulated groups implicitly selected the 'alliance' script with the aim of increasing their resources and ability to coerce the regime. Available evidence suggests that the alliance of the Sa'idis and the Cairenes was not officially named *Tanzim al-Jihad* until 1982; nevertheless, I use it to refer to the alliance from 1980 for the sake of simplicity. Figures on the number of cells vary from between four and six: Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 30. 'Five or six', Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda's Road to 9/11* (Penguin, 2007). 42. Both Kepel and Ibrahim suggest four: Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*. Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays*; Ibrahim, 'Egypt's Islamic Militants'. On the geographic differences between the groups, see Mamoun Fandy, 'Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?', *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (1994); and Toth, 'Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement'. It is worthwhile noting that neither of the constituent groups had a name. Almost all analyses of the organisation suggest that the Cairo branch was called 'al-Jihad' and the Assiut branch *al-Gama'a*. See Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Hamied N. Ansari, 'The Islamic militants in Egyptian politics', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 1 (1984); Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*; Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*; Sivan, *Radical Islam*; Wright, *Looming Tower*. I found no evidence for this in my research or my interviews, indeed, it seems likely that this is the consequence of applying the names of the two groups which they would become in the mid-1980s to their pre-merger identities.

⁵⁴ Ansari, 'The Islamic militants in Egyptian politics'.

achieve its political goals.⁵⁵ The leader of the Middle Egypt branch was Karam al-Zuhdi; having read Farag's work and heard of his reputation, he arranged to meet him in the spring of 1980 to discuss the possibility of co-operation. The two leaders agreed that the Islamist movement desperately needed a strategic re-evaluation if it was to attain its political goals and decided in a second meeting in June 1980, that a formal (if loose) alliance between the two groups could be profitable. To lend the embryonic organisation the religious credibility it would need for recruitment, they co-opted Umar Abd al-Rahman, a Sheikh from Faiyyoum, to provide theological justification for their actions in the form of *fatawa* and to act as a figurehead.⁵⁶

Sadat was not unaware that Islamists were regrouping with violence in mind, but there was little he could do without isolating non-violent Islamists. Indeed, it was not until 1981 that Sadat was able to confront these radical Islamist clusters. The pretext came after a brutal episode in al-Zawiyya al-Hamra in June 1981. The origins of the tragedy remain unclear, but what is known is that clashes of startling violence took place in the impoverished Cairene suburb of al-Zawiyya al-Hamra between Coptic and Muslim communities in which '[m]en and women were slaughtered; babies were thrown from windows, their bodies crushed on the pavements below; there was looting, killing, arson'.⁵⁷ Sadat capitalised on the episode, formally dissolving the *jama'at* and issuing warrants for the arrest of its members. The reprisals were reasonably successful in breaking the remnants of the *jama'at* on the campuses, but they did nothing to challenge the violent Islamist clusters nor the less lethal *jama'at*, many of whom, in the words of a former British diplomat 'dispensed with their *galabiyat*, shaved their beards and went underground to join more violent associations such as *Tanzim al-Jihad*'.⁵⁸

The events of al-Zawiyya al-Hamra in 1981 and the subsequent repression not only produced increasingly embittered antipathy towards Sadat amongst the Islamist movement, but presented its more radical and violent elements with an opportunity. Khalid al-Islambuli, whose brother Muhammad had been arrested in the round-up, was a lieutenant in the artillery corps and had been placed in charge of an armoured transport vehicle at the anniversary celebration of the 1973 war, which Sadat would be attending. In the wake of his

⁵⁵ For a copy of the text, see Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986). Tracts are reproduced in Euben and Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*.

⁵⁶ Ansari, 'The Islamic militants in Egyptian politics'.

⁵⁷ Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 171. See also, Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*: 222.

⁵⁸ Interview with former British diplomat, Cambridge, 7th May 2012.

brother's arrest which left him devastated, he came up with a crude but effective plan for assassinating Sadat which he passed on to Farag: he would replace the men under his command with three accomplices, smuggle in hand grenades and machine guns and kill Sadat as the vehicle passed the presidential box.

In late September 1981, Farag and his deputy, Abbud al-Zumr, met with their opposite number from Middle Egypt, Karam al-Zuhdi, to discuss the attack. Although both Farag and al-Zuhdi agreed that the assassination of Sadat was necessary, there was little agreement about how to proceed after the assassination; for Farag, the plan was an ideal opportunity to kill Sadat, initiate a *coup d'état* in Cairo and establish the Islamic State. For al-Zuhdi, the assassination would leave Egypt ungoverned and create the kind of confusion and panic in which he could overthrow security structures in Asyut, occupy and Islamise the city and from there gather the momentum required for establishing the Islamic Society. By contrast, al-Zumr, an Air Force intelligence officer with a speciality in security, argued that the government forces, even in the aftermath of the assassination, would be able to regain control unless there was significant popular support – a precondition which was, he argued, absent. In the event, al-Zumr was overruled and the strategic visions of Farag and al-Zuhdi merged: the assassination would be followed by a military offensive against security 'nerve centres' in Asyut; this, in turn, would allow Farag to incite a popular religious revolution which would overthrow the last remaining vestiges of the *jahili* regime.

On 6 October, al-Islambuli and three associates leapt out of their armoured vehicle, erratically hurled hand grenades and opened fire on the President. In full view of the television cameras, al-Islambuli could be heard shouting: 'I am Khaled al-Islambuli. I have killed Pharoah. I do not fear death'.⁵⁹ Although the Assyut operation was meant to follow immediately, the uprising had taken longer to organise than al-Zuhdi had bargained on and it was not until 8 October, on the first day of *Eid al-Adha*, that the operation took place. Several groups of militants broke into the security headquarters, beheading the Christian commander and massacring those inside; at first it seemed the operation was a success as local security forces failed to respond, but the following day, paratroopers were flown in from Cairo and brought the situation under control. As al-Zumr predicted, the assassination of Sadat changed very little.

⁵⁹ Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharoah*.

Mobilisation, Attrition and the Hybridisation of Strategic Visions

Although Sadat's death was received with jubilation in both Islamist and non-Islamist circles, not least because he was seen to be dictatorial, eccentric and living 'in a world of his own creation in which he was the continuing star and from which all hostile forces were effectively excluded', it singularly failed to bring about the mass uprising which Farag had envisaged, nor indeed, to paralyse state security structures as al-Zuhdi had predicted.⁶⁰ Indeed, Kepel sums up the long-term effects of the assassination as

... a spectacular success for the movement, coming after two decades of abortive confrontations with the state and triumphant repression. But after 6 October and the brief alarm aroused by Islamist sedition in the city of Asyut on 8 October, that success proved to be no more than spectacle. Sadat was replaced by his vice-president, and there was no structural modification of the state likely to satisfy the Islamist movement. Repression against the movement intensified, and it was condemned to languish. To employ the terminology inspired by Qutb, the movement entered a new 'phase of weakness'.⁶¹

Although both Farag and al-Zuhdi had their own strategic visions, the opportunity to assassinate Sadat was so enticing to both parts of the alliance that they had to reconsider and reformulate their scripts in cooperation with one another. In the end, neither Farag's nor al-Zuhdi's strategic scripts remained in their original form, rather they were combined and melded to produce a new hybridised script. The assassination undertaken by Farag's group was to be followed by a military offensive against security 'nerve centres' executed by al-Zuhdi's group. These two blows, they anticipated, would send the state reeling in confusion, freeing the population to rise up in a popular religious revolution which would overthrow the last remaining vestiges of the *jahili* regime.⁶² In this sense, the strategy that was implemented was the product of two separate scripts which were latticed together in the meeting of September 1981. It is important to take each script separately in order to establish how, individually, both groups envisaged their strategies unfolding and why particular scripts appealed to them before going on to examine how these strategic visions were merged and exploring the effects of this hybridisation.

Essentially, the Cairo group under Farag followed what we might term a 'mobilisation' script: he saw violence in the form of political assassination as a tool for liberating the Egyptian

⁶⁰ Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*: 182.

⁶¹ Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 198.

⁶² To use Kepel's phrase, see e.g. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

people from the authoritarianism of a *jahili* regime and thus for inciting a popular Islamic insurrection which would overthrow the government and pave the way for the establishment of the Islamic state. This strategic vision was modelled, in large part, on the Iranian Revolution of 1979, whose popular uprising had found its imitators across the Muslim world.⁶³ In his interrogations, Farag would return time and again to the Iranian Revolution as a successful model for inciting an Islamic revolution and achieving political goals.⁶⁴ Abbud al-Zumr, the deputy of the Cairo branch, was equally clear about the influence of the Iranian script. At his trial he said:

Our plan was based on a popular revolution and the preparation of the rank-and-file was towards that aim... popular revolution will solve the problem of the armed forces and the police because it is impossible for them to turn their guns on the people... The Iranian experience shows that in the event of popular revolution it is very difficult for the armed forces and the police to combat the popular masses who want the application of God's *shari'a*.⁶⁵

In this sense, Farag and al-Zumr envisaged popular uprising as a way of presenting the regime with two choices, both of which were detrimental to the regime and advantageous to the *Tanzim*. State repression of vast portions of the population would not only be morally unacceptable and politically untenable but also serve explicitly to legitimise Islamist claims about regime authoritarianism and impiety. If, on the other hand, the regime chose to weather the storm by not reacting to an Islamic revolution, they would once again implicitly condone and legitimise the Islamist politico-religious philosophy.

The fact that, in formulating this script, Farag focused so heavily on the regime is significant. Although he sought to emulate the Iranian revolution in his strategic vision, it was largely to avert what he saw as the causes of the strategic failure of other Egyptian violent Islamists, about which he was absolutely clear. As he wrote in *Farida al-Gha'iba*:

How can nonviolent propaganda [*da'awa*] be widely successful when all means of mass communication today are under the

⁶³ As Stein phrases it, 'environmental influences, particularly the Iranian Revolution, certainly created a general atmosphere of possibility for Islamists as a whole'. Ewan Stein, 'An Uncivil Partnership: Egypt's Jama'a Islamiyya and the state after the Jihad', *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (2011): 866; see also Shahrough Akhavi, 'The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Egypt,' in *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*, ed. John Esposito (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990); Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 118f.

⁶⁴ Some of these interrogation reports are in the possession of the author, although there is no way to verify their authenticity. This point, however, is supported by Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 87.

⁶⁵ Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh*: 212-13.

control of the pagan and wicked state and under the control of those who are at war with God's religion...There are, however, those who say that they will emigrate to the desert and then come back and confront the Pharoah, as Moses did, and then God will make the ground swallow the Pharoah up together with his army... All these strange ideas only result from having forsaken the only true and religiously allowed road towards establishing an Islamic state. To begin by putting an end to imperialism is not laudatory and not a useful act. It is only a waste of time. We must concentrate on our own Islamic situation: we have to establish God's religion in his own country first, and to make the Word of God supreme ... There is no doubt that the first battlefield for jihad is the extermination of these infidel leaders and to replace them by [sic] a complete Islamic order. From here we should start.⁶⁶

Farag therefore felt that other groups failed not because of the gulf between their means and their ends, but because they attempted to gain critical mass before confronting the regime; this was, according to him, a fruitless enterprise at best and plain dereliction of duty at worst. Rather, Farag argued, the best way to maximise meagre means was to escalate as soon as possible: this would not only increase the coercive volume of political demands, but provide far greater 'advertisement of the cause' than producing pamphlets or hiding in the mountains. In this sense, Farag essentially attempted to bypass the 'survival' script which had been adopted by groups as they transitioned to violence; based on the outcome of his predecessors in Egypt, he rationalised that there was little point in attempting to gather resources in order to reach the 'phase of power', 'since ultimately it all led to the gallows'; instead, Islamist groups had to confront the enemy if they were to persuade others that they had resolve and expertise and were therefore deserving of popular support.⁶⁷

al-Zuhdi and the Assyut group, by contrast, wanted to follow an attritional script which fell into two distinct strategic phases. In the first stage, terrorism would be deployed in the South in order to drive out Coptic influence, reduce the authority of the regime and, ultimately, create an Islamic mini-state. For al-Zuhdi, the Copts represented a genuine threat to the Islamism in Upper Egypt and, therefore had to be the first targets.⁶⁸ As Montassir al-Zayyat, a member of the Cairo grouping who would become a lawyer for many violent Islamists, put it, 'we were preparing ourselves for an armed struggle in the desert. Our goal was to resist a

⁶⁶ Euben and Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*: 332-37 §57, §62 and §70.

⁶⁷ Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 209.

⁶⁸ Coptic communities were engaged in an exerted effort to recruit through proselytism and police raids discovered caches of arms and weaponry. See *ibid.*, 164f.

possible attack by the Christians who we really believed were stockpiling weapons in their churches'.⁶⁹ At his trial, al-Zuhdi echoed this, saying

The way I see it, the Christians are concentrated in Minya and Asyut and they take advantage of numbers to hold demonstrations of strength and superiority. They have arms and this is what encourages the Muslim youth to react forcibly against missionary proselytism [*da'awa*]... [they are] waiting for the day to take them out, as in Lebanon, so they can turn Egypt into a Coptic country whose capital would be Asyut...⁷⁰

It is interesting that al-Zuhdi's analysis of Coptic strategy should so closely mirror his own script. The Copts, so his argument runs, practise a parallel form of *da'awa* in order to achieve a state of strength from which they will launch an insurgency, capturing the South and creating a Christian state on Islamic territory. The only way to prevent this, in al-Zuhdi's strategic calculation, was to pre-empt Coptic violence and gain the upper hand by coercing them to leave the South. Only once Coptic presence had been removed could the regime be confronted and expelled.

In the second stage, al-Zuhdi envisaged abandoning terrorism as a strategy and replacing it with an insurgent war waged from the safe havens of the now truly Islamic mini-state. This stage was born from parallels abroad. al-Zuhdi was conscious that outside Egypt other organisations with consonant ideological visions were successfully making headway for their causes by deploying attritional insurgent scripts. As the image of the *mujahid*, living off the land and attacking vastly superior enemies before melting into the distance came to the fore as a key item of Islamist propaganda, so al-Zuhdi became increasingly convinced of the potential success an insurgency could have in the Egyptian context. As one lifelong observer of violent Islamism in Egypt noted to the author, 'don't underestimate the sexiness of the AK47. The image of the lone Palestinian from the PLO or Fatah wandering through the desert had its impact on ... the *Gama'a*'.⁷¹

In the end, of course, neither script was implemented in its original form. With the exception of al-Zuhdi's pre-emptive campaign against the Coptic communities of the south, both scripts were woven together in their entirety: Farag's decapitation of the regime and al-Zuhdi's

⁶⁹ François Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999). 82. There was also a conspiracy theory that these weapons were brought in under the personal supervision of Rosalynn Carter (p.83).

⁷⁰ Kepel, *Roots of Radical Islam*: 215.

⁷¹ Interview with 'John' (Chief Middle East Correspondent, The Economist), London 13th April 2012.

occupation of territory would simultaneously paralyse state responses and incite an Islamic uprising which would overthrow the by now fragile regime. Indeed, there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the new combined script: none of its internal elements were inherently in conflict with one another and the various stages seemed plausible in theory. In practice, however, the script made a number of unrealistic claims and the strategy was a failure: in particular, Farag's assumption that the assassination of Sadat would initiate a popular uprising was – as al-Zumr had pointed out in the meeting in 1981 – ill-judged and, although al-Zuhdi's group were able to overthrow security centres in Asyut, they could not defend themselves against the subsequent military response from Cairo. In this sense, the hybrid strategy failed not because it was predicated on two different scripts which were interwoven, but because these constituent parts were inherently flawed: Sadat's death was followed by jubilation but not by a popular insurrection, the regime remained broadly functional and the security 'nerve centres' far from being paralysed responded to a new situation rapidly. Despite Farag's careful evaluation of the failures of his predecessors and the attention he devoted to bypassing these, the 'strategic gap' – the space between how scripts were envisaged to work and how they actually worked – remained.

Attrition, Power Play and The Escalation Trap

After the assassination of Sadat, the regime responded as it always had done to Islamist violence – with severe repression. Mubarak reactivated the Emergency Law, first established in 1958 under Nasser, which suspended constitutional protections and members of the *Tanzim al-Jihad* in both Cairo and Middle Egypt were rapidly rounded up.⁷² In April 1982, Abd al-Salam Farag, Khaled al-Islambuli and his three accomplices were sentenced to death and the remaining leaders of the *Tanzim* were given life sentences. A second trial of 302 lower-ranking members of the *Tanzim al-Jihad*, amongst them Ayman al-Zawahiri, lasted for over three years at the end of which most were given relatively short sentences which they had already served in the intervening period.⁷³

⁷² The Emergency Law had been reactivated in 1967 and ran continuously until early 1980; an 18 month hiatus came to an end with the assassination of Sadat and the Emergency law was continuously in place until June 2012, when the Military Council partially lifted the laws, stating that they would still remain for acts of thuggery (*beltagiyya*). Amnesty International, 'Egypt: Arbitrary Detention and Torture under Emergency Powers,' (1989); International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 'Egypt: Counter-Terrorism against the Background of an Endless State of Emergency,' (FIDH, 2010).

⁷³ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 32-33.

The execution of Farag and the brutal prison experience was central to the development of violent Islamism in Egypt. Structurally, it paved the way for a younger leadership to fill the void created by the loss of Farag. The members of this faction, informally led by al-Zawahiri who had risen to the fore during the trials, became increasingly militant as they witnessed the torture of violent Islamists and experienced it for themselves.⁷⁴ During his incarceration, al-Zawahiri described his treatment at the hands of the prison guards in an interview to foreign journalists who were brought to the prison, saying:

We suffered the severest inhuman treatment. They kicked us, they beat us, they whipped us with electric cables, they shocked us with electricity... And they used the wild dogs... [and] they hung us over the edges of the doors with our hands tied at the back! They arrested the wives, the mothers, the fathers, the sisters and the sons... where is justice?⁷⁵

As the younger members gained respect and authority as a consequence of this treatment, there developed a vigorous – eventually, vituperative – debate over who should lead the *Tanzim al-Jihad* which, ultimately, dissolved the (by now fragile) alliance. The Cairo group argued that Sheikh Umar Abd al-Rahman could not lead a group of the faithful because he was blind; those from Middle Egypt responded that al-Zawahiri could not lead such a group either because he was imprisoned.⁷⁶ As hostility grew, so the two groups diverged and became discrete identities with their own formal titles: the Cairo group emerged as the EIJ under the

⁷⁴ al-Zawahiri was reportedly tortured to get information on the whereabouts of his close friend Essam al-Qamari Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2004). 31. al-Qamari was an army officer and close friend of al-Zawahiri, who had recruited him some years earlier. Other cases of torture are too numerous to recount here: suffice it to say that there is widespread acknowledgement that torture was (and is) 'standard practice' in Egyptian security facilities. See e.g. Heba Saleh, 'Egyptian report denounces torture,' (2005). Specific examples had an impact on violent Islamist groups; most infamously, the treatment of Sayyid Qutb shaped the nature and attitudes of *Ma'alim fil-Tariq* towards the *jahili* regime. For fuller discussions of torture in Egypt see, Amnesty International, 'Egypt: Grave Human Rights Abuses Amid Political Violence,' (1993); Amnesty International, 'Egypt: Arbitrary Detention and Torture under Emergency Powers,'; Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights Watch World Report 1993,' (1993); Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights Watch World Report 1994,' (1994); Human Rights Watch, 'Behind Closed Doors: Torture and Detention in Egypt,' (1992); Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, 'When Will the Crime of Torture Stop?,' (2009); International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 'Egypt: Counter-Terrorism against the Background of an Endless State of Emergency.'

⁷⁵ Kepel et al., *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*: 154 (with minor additions for clarity). After his treatment al-Zawahiri would long remain passionate on the subject of torture. In 1992, he devoted an entire book, entitled *The Black Book* to cataloguing the torture of Islamists and non-Islamists, arguing that the former received the most brutal treatment.

⁷⁶ This particular aspect of the debate would continue well into the 1990s; see Hisham Mubarak, 'What Does the *Gama'a Islamiyya* Want? Tal'at Fu'ad Qasim, interview with Hisham Mubarak,' in *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, ed. Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (University of California Press, 1997).

command of Ayman al-Zawahiri; the Middle Egypt group fell under the leadership of al-Zuhdi and became the EIG.

In reality, as we shall see, this was less a debate about leadership and more a question of conflicting strategic visions.⁷⁷ al-Zawahiri, like his strategic mentor Farag, envisaged a mobilisation script which involved assassinating the leaders of the regime followed by the establishment of an Islamic state through a popular Islamic revolution. al-Zuhdi, by contrast, continued to champion his long-standing attritional script of occupying territory and establishing an Islamic mini-state from which they could conduct their final insurgent confrontation with the regime.⁷⁸ These two groups, with their similar titles, the shifting allegiances of their members and their shared experiences in prison and beyond make for difficult, sometimes incoherent, history. In order to simplify matters, this section falls into two parts. The first part examines the EIG, focusing on the scripts they envisaged and the strategies they implemented in Egypt; the second explores the growth of the EIJ, scrutinising the way in which their strategic scripts were moulded by al-Zawahiri's experience of Afghanistan.

'Attrition' and the Escalation Trap: The EIG

In the mid-1980s, as the war in Afghanistan against the Soviets reached its climax, most members of EIG left Egypt for Peshawar where Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden had established the *Maktab al-Khidamat* [Services Bureau] to sort administrative difficulties for the *mujahideen* and the *Bayt al-Ansar* [House of the Supporters] which provided them with quarters.⁷⁹ Although the EIG was nominally run by Karam al-Zuhdi who was the central figure in the organisation's 'historic leadership', he remained in prison and it was Ta'lat Fu'ad Qasim who took over the day-to-day running of the organisation in Peshawar. Meanwhile, Sheikh Umar Abd al-Rahman had re-installed himself in the Faiyyoum Oasis, and, aside from making trips to Afghanistan via Peshawar, occupied his time by issuing a tirade of *fatawa*, devoted largely to attacking the Coptic community and to enforcing Islamic morality in urban

⁷⁷ Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 221; Wright, *Looming Tower*: 56-7.

⁷⁸ Gerjes, *The Far Enemy*: 99-101. Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda: Updated Edition* (London: Abacus, 2008). 69.

⁷⁹ The part played by the EIG in Afghanistan falls outside the remit of this research. There are a number of excellent studies, e.g. Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The world's most unstable region and the threat to global security* (Penguin, 2009); Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*; Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Gerjes, *The Far Enemy*; Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban / Al-Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010* (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2012); Wright, *Looming Tower*.

centres.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, as the Afghan *jihad* wound down and, in February 1989, came to a formal end in the Soviet withdrawal, EIG members returned home to swell the ranks of the organisation on Egyptian territory.

As the Afghan Arabs returned from the *jihad* at the end of the 1980s, there was a noticeable escalation in attacks in Egypt. In the years from 1970 to 1989, approximately 120 deaths were recorded in total, but between 1992 and 1997, there was a total of 1442 casualties in near daily attacks, about ninety per cent of which were the work of the EIG.⁸¹ Kepel usefully describes the EIG's strategic vision at this stage:

[The EIG] envisaged open, widespread recruitment, the control of whole areas of territory seized from the state, and the imposition in those areas of the Islamic order. Militants understood this in moral terms (harrying individuals whose morality was suspect, forcing closures of video shops, hairdressers, liquor stores, cinemas and so on). It also had a doctrinal-juridical aspect (Copts should be coerced into paying the protection tax prescribed by the sharia for non-Muslims living under Islamic domination) and a political-military one (state officials, policemen and so on should be physically attacked at every opportunity).⁸²

In this sense, the EIG envisaged, as they had prior to the assassination of Sadat, a decidedly attritional script. Violence, both vigilantist and terrorist, was to be deployed against the local population in order to coerce them to behave according to Islamic rules and thus to 'Islamise' territory; equally violence was to be used against the state to erode their resources and, in so doing, to force the regime to retreat thus giving the organisation control over tracts of territory.⁸³

Buoyed by the return of veterans of the Afghan *jihad*, the EIG began to escalate their attritional script. Following a rumour that the Christians had developed a special spray which, when applied to veils of Muslim women, would produce the sign of the cross if washed, they

⁸⁰ al-Rahman made a number of trips into Afghanistan before he was re-arrested in Egypt in 1986; one interviewee said that the last trip was in 1988 and that he took his two oldest sons, Mohammed and Asim. Interview with Abdallah, Cairo, January 2012. Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*: 76-77; Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 282-3.

⁸¹ Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 71. Further figures can be found in Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays*: 88. Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya,' 199.

⁸² Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 282.

⁸³ Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 77 cites Abdel Azim Ramadan as saying that the EIG 'established roving bands that often engaged in "forbidding vice" – segregating the sexes, preventing girls from engaging in sporting activities at schools and breaking up concerts'.

resumed their campaign of attacks on the Coptic communities of Upper Egypt.⁸⁴ These attacks increased threefold between 1992 and 1994 in comparison with the entire preceding decade and continued until the EIG de-mobilised in 1997.⁸⁵ Attacks on critics of Islamist ideology similarly escalated. In October 1990, the EIG executed Rifaat al-Mahgoub, a former academic who became speaker of Egypt's Parliament.⁸⁶ On 8 June 1992, they assassinated Farag Foda, a sharp-witted satirist of the Islamist community who had recently written an article which argued that Islamist motivations were less about politics and more about sexual frustration.⁸⁷ In the following years, the EIG continued to target secular intellectuals: threats were made against Nasr Abu Zeid, a university professor who was forcibly divorced from his wife by a special tribunal on the grounds that a Muslim woman could not be married to an apostate; numerous threats were also made against Nobel laureate, Naguib Mahfouz which culminated in an assassination attempt when he was stabbed by a member of the EIG in October 1994. To these by-now-standard elements of the attrition script, the EIG added attacks against the tourist trade and by extension the financial industry. In 1992, Sheikh Umar Abd al-Rahman, who had now relocated to the US from Sudan, issued a *fatwa* declaring tourism *haram* and 'an enterprise of debauchery that promoted alcoholism'.⁸⁸ EIG members duly acted. The campaign began in Upper Egypt, where they attacked a boat on the Nile and later German tourists in Asyut and in Qena; in 1993, Cairo became the focus with bombings of tourist hotspots, cafés and coach parties. Although these attacks, which continued intermittently until 1997, had negligible long-term impact on tourism, they were at least partially successful in advertising the cause and gaining the attention of the under-privileged youth on the periphery of Egypt's urban centres.⁸⁹

Indeed, the EIG were becoming increasingly popular. Hafez and Wiktorowicz, for example, argue that they had been able to establish "liberated zones" in some of the towns of Upper Egypt and Greater Cairo. In the Asyut city of Dairut, the Gama'a controlled approximately 150 mosques and in some neighbourhoods, they imposed complete control'.⁹⁰ One interview with a former British Official suggested that various parts of Cairo – al-Zawiyya al-Hamra, Boulaq al-Dakroul and Imbaba – were essentially 'Gama'a fiefdoms', which the 'regime left them to

⁸⁴ This anecdote was discussed in interviews, particularly Interview with 'Mark' (former BBC and *Financial Times* journalist in Middle East), London 12th March 2011.

⁸⁵ Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 283; Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 72f.

⁸⁶ Alan Cowell, 'Mideast Tensions: Egypt's Parliament Speaker Is Assassinated by Gunmen,' *New York Times*, 13 October 1990.

⁸⁷ Wright, *Looming Tower*: 184.

⁸⁸ Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 288.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁹⁰ Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 76.

run'.⁹¹ My own wanderings through Imbaba and interviews with its inhabitants – even twenty years on – confirmed this; people remembered deliveries of rice and bread, even meat; others remembered hand-outs of clothing and, in the aftermath of the 1992 earthquake, medical supplies and tents marked with '*Islam howa al-hal*' [Islam is the solution].⁹² Increasingly, the EIG (and the Islamist movement more broadly) were capitalising on the permissive climate by running political and social systems which the state had failed to implement properly.⁹³

By 1992, with their ranks swelled by personnel from the Afghan front and widespread popular support, the EIG escalated their campaign of attrition. They not only increased the rate and lethality of their violence, as we have seen, but focused it on multiple targets: secular intellectuals, the tourist industry and the Coptic community alike. Simultaneously, they began to take control of certain districts in Cairo and the cities of Upper Egypt through social activism, regulating behaviour with the threat and reality of vigilantist violence whilst doling out supplies to improve their image. As Ta'lat Fu'ad Qasim said in an interview with Hisham Mubarak:

First we are making ongoing preparations for a military coup. The security forces don't know about these because they are preoccupied with skirmishes in the *sa'id* [Upper Egypt]. Second we are working in the area of mass mobilization. When the Islamic revolution happens there will be mass support to head off foreign intervention.⁹⁴

Although Qasim talks of mobilisation, the EIG's strategic vision fits more comfortably with the description of attrition provided in Chapter 1. Violence was not deployed in order to destabilise the regime and incite a popular Islamic revolution, as Farag had seen it and as it would be in a 'mobilisation' script, but to remove *jahili* presence by enforcing Islamic behaviour and evicting Copts, tourists, secular Egyptians and government authority from Islamic space.

⁹¹ Interview with former British diplomat in Egypt, Cambridge, 7th May 2012.

⁹² This is based on informal conversations with residents of Imbaba. It is corroborated by Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 290, who argues that the EIG 'were organizing everything: sporting activities, schools, militias that maintained Islamic order in the quarter and opposed any attempt by the Police to assert control'. The slogan became representative of the unity of the Islamist movement – a fact which caused great concern in the Government. Tents with *Islam howa al-Hal* marked on the side were confiscated by the Government when the Brotherhood was distributing them after the 1992 Earthquake.

⁹³ Toth, 'Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement', 563.

⁹⁴ Mubarak, 'What Does the *Gama'a Islamiyya* Want? Ta'lat Fu'ad Qasim, interview with Hisham Mubarak,' 322.

Although this was a terrorist campaign, in this sense it was broadly consonant with traditional scripts of attrition deployed by insurgents. Robert Taber provides an enlightening account of the insurgent script of attrition:

Analogically the guerrilla fights the war of the flea, and his military enemy suffers the dog's disadvantages: too much to defend; too small, ubiquitous, and agile an enemy to come to grips with. If the war continues long enough – this is the theory – the dog succumbs to exhaustion and anaemia without ever having found anything on which to close his jaws or to rake with his claws.... the flea, having multiplied to a veritable plague of fleas through long series of small victories, each drawing its drop of blood, each claiming the reward of a few more captured weapons to arm yet a few more partisans, concentrates his forces for a decisive series of powerful blows.⁹⁵

The EIG's script virtually replicates this description. In essence, they envisaged attrition by 'Islamisation': they sought to occupy territory by expelling all influences that were not deemed to be Islamic and nurturing all those which were. This was a painstaking process, driven by a series of small victories – an assassination here, a foothold in a district there – rather than a single confrontation with the opposition. Eventually, they rationalised, they would transition from the 'state of weakness' to the 'phase of power', by gaining territory and ensuring that that territory was occupied solely by 'true' Muslims. Once critical mass had been reached, they could confront the regime directly with force.

In practice, however, the script failed to take account of the fact that if one constantly gnaws at an opposition, carving off minute morsels here and there, then that opposition will, in all likelihood, try to swat the flea before allowing itself to bleed to death. In mid-1992, Mubarak took this option and confronted the EIG, largely one suspects, in response to the assassination of Farag Foda and execution of Rifaat al-Mahgoub.⁹⁶ Primarily, this involved mass arrest of suspects: between 1992 and 1997, more than 47,000 were arrested; in 1992 alone, 9,248 people were detained (an average, Burgat points out, of 25 per day) and by 1994, the total

⁹⁵ Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea* (London: Paladin, 1977). 29. There were, of course, differences in the way that terrorist attrition and insurgent attrition were implemented, but the point is that the way in which the script aimed to coerce the opposition remained the same.

⁹⁶ This point is widely made, normally with the rider that these assassinations were in response to the assassination of Ala Muhieddin by the regime in September 1990. Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya,' 207; Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004). 83; Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam*: 98.

number of political prisoners exceeded 24,000.⁹⁷ Even in 2000, after the release of some detainees as a result of the non-violence initiative, it was estimated that between 15,000 and 16,000 political prisoners were still in detention. The policy of mass arrests was facilitated by the introduction of Article 86 of Law 97 in 1992 which incorporated elements so generalised that it could 'brand almost anyone it deemed fit as a terrorist'.⁹⁸ Article 86a was particularly ill-defined, allowing for a sentence of

execution or a life sentence of hard labor for the supplying of groups, gangs or other terrorist formations with weapons, ammunition, explosives, materials, instruments, funds or information that assist them in carrying out their aims.⁹⁹

Arbitrary detention was accompanied by military presence and aggression. In May 1992, 2,000 troops were deployed for several months in the South where they imposed a curfew and established what amounted to martial law in areas where the majority of the population had clearly sided with the EIG.¹⁰⁰ In 1992, Sheikh Gaber, a military commander in EIG, boasted to Reuters that Imbaba had become 'an Islamic Republic' (a name which it still holds, affectionately, today). A month later, 14,000 troops moved in and occupied the quarter for 6 weeks, removing some 5,000 supporters and militants.¹⁰¹ Individuals were arbitrarily stopped, detained temporarily and tortured; by the late 1980s female members of Islamist families were increasingly being included in these round-ups.¹⁰² The fictional account of a Brigadier General in Upper Egypt serves to describe the intensity and extent of these military occupations of the EIG 'liberated zones':

The soldiers descended upon the streets beating and kicking anyone they ran across. The investigating officers, intelligence officials, and some of the central security officers searched the houses of the village one by one ... During the search, the policemen threw the contents of the houses outside ... Instructions were issued to take all of the village men between fifteen and forty-five to the police headquarters ... The officers found the home of a

⁹⁷ Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 78. The 1992 figure is from Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam*: 98-9. The 2000 figure is from the U.S. Department of State, '2000 Country Report on Human Rights in Egypt,' (Bureau of Public Affairs, 2001).

⁹⁸ Kassem, *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*: 155.

⁹⁹ International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 'Egypt: Counter-Terrorism against the Background of an Endless State of Emergency,' 12.

¹⁰⁰ Kassem, *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*: 155; Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 78.

¹⁰¹ Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 291.

¹⁰² Burgat describes the rationale: 'in order to arrest the members of the Gama'a Islamiyya, their wives, sisters and even their mothers were punished by embargoes, sometimes by the destruction of their homes and, in at least one case, the destruction of an entire hamlet'. Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam*: 99.

suspected terrorist and an older man was dragged out. It was clear that he was severely beaten and showed no resistance...He was asked about the whereabouts of his son, and he answered that he didn't know. He was insulted, mocked, and then the lower part of his body was stripped and he was beaten severely on his buttocks. The officers threatened to bring his daughter to the station and do to her what they did to him. The man trembled and fell down on the ground ... A group then went to the man's house with a bulldozer, agricultural tractors and other vehicles. The security services stormed into the house and evicted its dwellers. The major general ordered that the bulldozer pull down the house.¹⁰³

Although the account is fictional, it tallies with allegations made in off-the-record interviews with the author.¹⁰⁴ Whether accurate in detail or not, what is certain is that the army sought to break support for the EIG in areas where it had substantial popularity in the local population.

By late 1996, the group was beginning to flag. Regime repression had brought about the death, arrest or execution of many of the *mujahideen* who had returned from Peshawar and although the group was far from destroyed, they had lost significant morale and confidence in their script. This is, perhaps, not surprising: in spite of the organisation's best efforts, considerable finance and sizeable membership they had not been able to realise their strategic vision. In 1997, the *Shura* Council of the EIG decided to relinquish violence as a strategy for achieving its ends. While the decision was widely adhered to (it was even briefly supported by Sheikh Abd al-Rahman, from jail in the US), various elements of the organisation resented the ceasefire and five months later, on 17 November 1997, EIG elements disguised as members of the security forces massacred 58 civilians and four security guards in the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor.

As we shall see, this is the problem with escalation. By pursuing a script with greater vigour in order to increase the coercive volume of one's political demands, one inevitably invites a backlash which endangers one's own survival. Neumann and Smith, who examine the EIG's escalation policy, echo this analysis in their discussion of what they term the 'escalation trap', arguing that 'any belligerent that faces a militarily more potent adversary has to take extreme care not to push the enemy into a corner to a point where it feels sufficiently desperate to

¹⁰³ The account was billed as being fictional, but was widely believed to have been autobiographical; the author has seen a copy after it was recommended in Interview with 'Hamdi', (former academic, pollster and analyst at Brookings), Cairo, May 17th 2011, London, 21st March 2012. This excerpt is taken from a translation provided in Lisa Blaydes and Lawrence Rubin, 'Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (2008).

¹⁰⁴ e.g. Interview with 'Abdullah', (former violent Islamist), Cairo, 2nd February 2012.

escalate the war to a level at which the repression becomes ruthless and total, thus threatening the terrorist group's very existence'.¹⁰⁵ From the perspective of scripts, the escalation trap is a further manifestation of the gulf between strategic vision and strategic action. The EIG's attritional script was carefully formulated and, judging by the fact that EIG members acted according to their assigned roles within scripts rather than pursuing their own personal terrorist visions, carefully communicated throughout the organisation; moreover the escalation was supported by considerable resources and substantial public support.¹⁰⁶ But despite the fact that the strategy was implemented as intended, inadequacies in the script meant that the EIG failed to bring about any substantive change in the Egyptian political landscape.

'Power Play' and 'Alliance Formation' in the face of Organisational Splits

If the story of the EIG is one of strategic unity, then the story of the EIJ is one of internal debate, dissent and, ultimately, organisational fracture. In 1986, after completing his prison sentence, al-Zawahiri went to Peshawar via Saudi Arabia; here he joined Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl), who had been part the *Tanzim al-Jihad* but, by fleeing to Pakistan, had avoided the October 1981 arrests. In the years that followed, al-Zawahiri and Dr. Fadl began to reconstitute the EIJ: they released a monthly magazine, *al-Fath* [The Conquest], along with a book by Dr. Fadl, *al-Umdah fi Idad al-Uddah* [The Essential Guide for Preparation], and became fully embedded in the community of Afghan Arabs.¹⁰⁷ This was an important period of development for the EIJ during which they were confronted with new strategic visions and had to defend their own: as Linschoten and Kuehn suggest, the Afghan theatre was a cauldron where '[p]eople met, thoughts and perspectives met, and personalities met. Groups fought out their rivalries, and different thoughts and ideas competed'.¹⁰⁸ By the time the Soviets announced their departure from Afghanistan in 1988, a vigorous debate over the strategic future of violent Islamism, which had already run on for some months, reached its apogee.

Sageman argues that there were essentially two groupings amongst the loose body of expatriate *mujahideen*: Abdullah Azzam, the founder of *Maktab al-Khidamat*, advocated a 'defensive' *jihad* to liberate Muslim lands from their occupiers in central Asia, Kashmir and Palestine; others, however, largely Egyptians and particularly those attached to the EIG,

¹⁰⁵ Neumann and Smith, 'Strategic Terrorism', 588-89.

¹⁰⁶ Neumann and Smith (ibid.) argue that lack of resources and public support are key difficulties for organisations attempting to escalate.

¹⁰⁷ This became a key text for Afghan Arabs. For a biography of Dr. Fadl, see Lawrence Wright, 'The Heretic,' *The Guardian*, 13th July 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Linschoten and Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created*: 93.

wanted to wage their attritional campaign in their home countries.¹⁰⁹ al-Zawahiri's own strategic vision between 1989 and 1995 was divided: on the one hand, he seems to have envisaged mobilising the EIJ against Egyptian targets across the Muslim world, and Yemen, Pakistan and Sudan in particular; on the other, he wanted to confront the regime directly in Egypt. As a consequence, the EIJ organically split into two entities: the first, 'exiled' element was under the command of al-Zawahiri and consisted of those who were unable to return to Egypt for fear of arrest and persecution and who therefore continued to attack the Egyptian regime abroad as and when they could. It was this group that, with the blessing and logistical help of bin Laden, now in Sudan, attempted to assassinate Mubarak as he visited Addis Ababa in June 1995 for a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity.¹¹⁰ This group was also responsible for the November 1995 attack on the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad.

The second element, nominally under al-Zawahiri's control though largely autonomous, consisted of those who had returned to Egypt by 1992 with the intention of confronting the regime directly on Egyptian soil. Things did not start well for this faction, which became known as the 'Vanguards of the Conquest'. In 1992, an EIJ leader was captured with the entire list of EIJ personnel on a computer, allowing the *Mukhabarat* to detain more than 800 members.¹¹¹ Although the group never really recovered, it did not stop them from three major attacks: the first was in August 1993, when they attempted to assassinate Hasan al-Alfi, then Interior minister, in the first use of the suicide bomb in Egypt. The second was in November when the group attacked Atef Sidqi, the prime minister, as he drove past a school. The blast left Sidqi unharmed but killed a schoolgirl. In the public outcry that ensued, the regime

¹⁰⁹ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 36; Linschoten and Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created*: 92-94.

¹¹⁰ Numerous studies suggest that this was the work of the EIG. I have found no evidence for this, indeed, based on the analysis of both organisations' strategy it is unrealistic for four reasons. First, there was considerable animosity between the EIG and the EIJ, and it seems unlikely that the former would have used the latter's support network, particularly when negotiations over an alliance had just fallen through. Second, the EIG were completely preoccupied with their attritional campaign in Egypt and in their written material demonstrate little interest in attacking outside Egyptian territory. Third, the operation was run by Mustafa Hamza, an Egyptian who had, after the Afghan *jihad*, followed bin Laden to Sudan and worked in one of his businesses in Khartoum (Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*: 312, n31.) Fourth, the attack was also helped by Sudanese intelligence, with whom bin Laden was close; that Sudanese intelligence would have been sufficiently close to the EIG to help with logistics seems unlikely. See Wright, *Looming Tower*: 214f; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004). 62. I follow Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*: 115. (It is worth noting, however, that he contradicts this position on p.154).

¹¹¹ al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*: 68. He says 'I announced at the time that the Vanguards of Conquest was not a separate group, and that Islamic Jihad [EIJ] and the Vanguards of Conquest were two names for the same group led by Zawahiri. This was clear from the fact that the four accused in the Vanguards of Conquest cases that were tried by a military court were shouting their allegiance to Zawahiri from behind bars'. This was backed up in by 'Abdullah', Interview with 'Abdullah', (former violent Islamist), Cairo, 2nd February 2012. See also, Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 41.

responded efficiently, arresting a further 280 with connections, predominantly, to the EIJ. This was followed by an attempted attack on an Israeli tourist bus in the Khan al-Khalili, which similarly resulted in the arrest of 107 suspects.¹¹²

al-Zawahiri lost considerable authority in the EIJ in this period, partly as a consequence of these failures and partly because of his growing conviction that the US was a more appropriate target for their attentions. This appears to have occurred to him from as early as 1995 and it rendered his strategic vision chaotic. In a 1995 article entitled 'The Road to Jerusalem is through Cairo', he advocates attacking the Egyptian government both at home and abroad, whilst simultaneously indicating that he would have preferred to attack the US:

We had to react to the Egyptian government's expansion of its campaign against the fundamentalists of Egypt outside the country. So we decided to target a painful goal for all the parties of this evil alliance. After studying the situation we decided to assign a group to react to this and we assigned their targets, first bombing the American Embassy in Islamabad and if that wasn't easy, then one of the American targets in Islamabad. . . . If that didn't work, then the target should be bombing a Western embassy famous for its historic hatred for Muslims, and if not that, then the Egyptian Embassy. Their extensive and detailed surveillance found that targeting the American Embassy was beyond the abilities of the assigned group, so we decided to study one of the American targets in Islamabad, and we discovered it has few American employees and most of the victims would be Pakistani. We also discovered that targeting the other Western embassies was beyond the abilities of the assigned group, so we settled on targeting the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, which was not only running a campaign for chasing Arabs in Pakistan but also spying on the Arab Mujahedeen...later, Pakistani security found in the ruins of the embassy evidence revealing the cooperation between India and Egypt in espionage.¹¹³

As he became closer to bin Laden and his philosophy, al-Zawahiri began, whether intentionally or not, to marginalise elements of the EIJ and in so doing to lose control of the organisation. As Scheuer puts it, 'Zawahiri faced stiff opposition from many in the EIJ over his intention to drop the group's historic Egypt-first orientation. Some EIJ leaders... objected to al-Zawahiri's insistence on co-operating with bin Laden, saying that he had caused the EIJ to

¹¹² Nimrod Raphaeli, 'Ayman Muhammad Rabi' Al-Zawahiri: The Making of an Arch-Terrorist', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 4 (2002): 12.

¹¹³ al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*: 84. The quote is extended by Raphaeli, 'Al-Zawahiri: The Making of an Arch-Terrorist', 12.

deviate from its main aim [establishing an Islamic state in Egypt through a military coup] and pushed the organisation into battle with the United States'.¹¹⁴

In an effort towards reunifying the group, he adopted two scripts in succession. The first was 'power play'. In the face of dissent and the looming prospect of a split in the EIJ, al-Zawahiri sought to stamp his authority on the organisation by ordering attacks on traditional EIJ targets in the form of the government: violence was intended to send a message to members of the EIJ that al-Zawahiri remained committed to attacking the 'near' enemy and that he remained in control of the organisation. That this involved a major escalation demonstrates al-Zawahiri's determination to retain authority: all the intended targets were conspicuously high-profile (the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister) and one of the attacks heralded the first use of suicide tactics in Egypt. By escalating, al-Zawahiri sought not only to underscore his own claims to authority, but to demonstrate that the EIJ's commitment to violence exceeded that of its rival, the EIG.¹¹⁵

Although al-Zawahiri's 'power play' script was successful in healing the EIJ's rifts in the short-term, government reprisals meant that the EIJ had little in the way of personnel with which to threaten the regime in Egypt. In this sense, he fell into the escalation trap: as the coercive leverage of attacks increased, the regime, already pressurised by the increase in EIG violence, retaliated with mass arrests which saw the detention of over a thousand people in just over a year. With severely limited resources, al-Zawahiri then proceeded to follow a second script, 'co-operation' by forming alliances. In April of that year, he attempted to establish a formal union between the EIG and the EIJ.¹¹⁶ The EIG, however, viewed bin Laden and his 'far enemy' philosophy with caution; moreover, the animosity between the EIG and the EIJ which started in Egyptian prisons in 1981 and reached a climax in the Afghan *jihad*, had never been fully resolved.¹¹⁷ al-Zawahiri's offer of partnership was rejected and with that rejection, al-Zawahiri began to look for other resources. After a trip to the US to raise funds, al-Zawahiri returned to Afghanistan in mid-1996 to join bin Laden after he was banished from Sudan. In

¹¹⁴ Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, Revised Edition* (Potomac Books Inc., 2006). 184.

¹¹⁵ Internally, the EIJ had fractured along the lines of those loyal to al-Zawahiri and Dr. Fadl and those younger members who were clamouring for action – particularly when they saw the repeated attacks of their rivals in the EIG. As Camille Tawil puts it: 'there is no question that many EIJ members were unhappy with the way in which al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya was hogging the [media] spotlight at the time'. (Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: Al Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists* (Saqi Books, 2010). 103.)

¹¹⁶ Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*: 154.

¹¹⁷ See for example, Mubarak, 'What Does the *Gama'a Islamiyya* Want? Tal'at Fu'ad Qasim, interview with Hisham Mubarak.' in which Qasim repeatedly distances the EIG from the EIJ (although he does note that 'there are efforts' towards forming a union).

late 1996, al-Zawahiri and bin Laden began to formulate a clear-cut strategy for attacking the US in the region, which culminated in the 1996 "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places".¹¹⁸

By 1998, only a few months after the EIG announced its intention to relinquish violence, al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden signed a document which explicitly stated their intention of attacking the "far enemy".¹¹⁹ This front was, in effect, an alliance of violent Islamist organisations; in addition to bin Laden, the text was signed by al-Zawahiri for EIJ and Rifa'i Taha on behalf of EIG.¹²⁰ As he aligned with bin Laden and effectively ostracised much of the rest of the EIJ, al-Zawahiri faced a mutiny within the organisation, whose members were not only suspicious of bin Laden's 'dark past' but wanted to target the Egyptian regime rather than the 'far enemy'.¹²¹ In the face of the upheaval of EIJ, al-Zawahiri threatened to resign and take with him bin Laden's financial support. For most in the EIJ, 'the only choice was to follow Zawahiri or abandon al-Jihad'; in the event, many, including al-Zawahiri's brother Mohammed, took the latter course.¹²² al-Zawahiri had evicted or disempowered the other leaders in a power struggle so unceremoniously that al-Zumr defected to the EIG.¹²³ Others joined similar groups in Yemen such as that established by Tariq al-Fadhli or simply relinquished their dual membership and devoted themselves to al-Qa'ida.¹²⁴ By the end of 1998, to all intents and purposes, the organisation ceased to exist: in a trial towards the end of that year, it was estimated that a core of only about forty militants, who remained only semi-active and based outside Egypt, continued to sustain the organisation's existence.

Strategic Scripts and The Escalation Trap

In this section we have seen two organisations escalate their campaigns: the EIG intensified their 'attrition' script by increasing the rate and lethality of their attacks and expanding the targets of their violence. The EIJ escalated in their 'power play' script by deploying violence in new, more extreme forms and by targeting increasingly high-profile political figures. In this

¹¹⁸ Excerpts can be found in Kepel et al., *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*: 47-50.

¹¹⁹ The majority of the remaining membership of EIJ rebelled against the decision, furious that al-Zawahiri had not informed or consulted with them. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*: ch. 3.

¹²⁰ Sheikh Mir Hamza for the Pakistani *Jamiat-ul-Ulema* and Fazlul Rahman, leader of the *Jihad Movement* in Bangladesh also signed; Wright, *Looming Tower*: 260. Bearing in mind their recent rejection of violence, the EIG historic leadership were livid when they found out that Taha had acted unilaterally and responded by dismissing him from the organisation. See Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 94.

¹²¹ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 47f. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*: 158f.

¹²² Wright, *Looming Tower*: 260.

¹²³ Ibid., 257-60.

¹²⁴ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*: 42. al-Fadhli is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

sense, escalation, which is not a script in its own right but a standardised way of adapting an existing unsuccessful script, is about convincing others of one's increased resolve and capacity to fight. In terms of allies, escalation is designed to act as a rallying-cry for the cause which convinces doubters and detractors to join the enterprise. In terms of enemies, escalation is designed to force them to conclude that, based on costs and benefits, the confrontation is not 'worth the price in blood and treasure' and the accommodation of terrorist demands is necessary.¹²⁵

But, by escalating, both the EIG and the EIJ risked what Smith and Neumann refer to as the escalation trap: '[i]nsurgents who employ terrorism as their principal means to obtain their objectives need to engage in a systematic analysis of their political and strategic situation... Failure to appreciate the limits inherent in a strategy of terrorism is likely to lead in one direction only, towards the escalation trap'.¹²⁶ Stone echoes this observation in his study of al-Qa'ida, noting that 'if a terrorist organization... is to make progress toward its ultimate objectives, it must inflict just sufficient death and destruction to ensure that its enemies are frightened and that potential supporters are rallied to the cause. If it is too timid in this regard, its activities will go largely ignored and its political program unfulfilled. On the other hand, if it causes a very great deal of death and destruction it risks incentivizing a crushing military response'.¹²⁷ The implication of all this is that terrorists must make difficult calculations about the scope of violence if escalation is to achieve the maximum levels of coercion possible whilst successfully avoiding repression.¹²⁸

A closer look at the case study, however, suggests that far from being difficult, these were exceedingly easy calculations, it was simply that the answers were unattractive. Decades of violent Islamism had shown that it did not take much in the way of terrorist action for the regime to react with full-scale repression and the EIG and the EIJ could reasonably assume that any attempt to escalate would be handled in a similar fashion. Nevertheless despite the fact that repression was essentially guaranteed, both organisations proceeded to escalate their scripts: why? The theoretical approach taken in this study suggests that scripts are at the heart of the problem. By hitting the enemy harder and faster than they had previously, so the strategic vision ran, they would be able to weather the storm of the inevitable reprisals while increasing the coercive volume of violence until it was so deafening that the opposition were

¹²⁵ To return to a previously cited quote from Betts, 'Is Strategy an Illusion?', 5.

¹²⁶ Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*: 93.

¹²⁷ John Stone, 'Al Qaeda, Deterrence, and Weapons of Mass Destruction', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 9 (2009): 765.

¹²⁸ Smith and Neumann, *The Strategy of Terrorism*: 93.

forced to acquiesce to their demands. In practice, however, both groups were unable to withstand government retaliation: between 1992 and 1993, for example, the state not only established new emergency laws and deployed 30,000 soldiers to Islamist strongholds in a six month period but also detained 27,214 individuals in what was an extraordinary display of repression.¹²⁹

From this analytical perspective the escalation trap does not occur from bad arithmetic and hard sums which aim to eke out maximum coercion for minimum repression. Rather, the escalation trap arises from a fundamentally flawed script which fails to recognise that, when an opposition is left with only two choices – react or concede (or, to return to the image used earlier, swat the flea or allow itself to bleed to death) – retaliation is likely to be desperate, brutal, all-encompassing and thus all the more likely to be life-threatening. In this sense, escalation, as a way of adapting scripts, underplays the opposition's commitment to the *status quo* and, more broadly, its continued existence; it is a product of the 'strategic gap' between terrorist strategic visions and the way those visions unfold when they are implemented.

De-mobilisation as a Strategic Choice in the EIG and the EIJ

Although full-blooded reprisals and government intransigence in the face of violence meant that neither the EIG nor the EIJ achieved their objectives in the long-term (or indeed, the short-term), repression did not obliterate the organisations as it had the 1965 Organisation, *Takfir wal-Hijra* and the Military Academy Group. It did, however, mean that both organisations recognised that their scripts had been inadequate or unsuitable and both began to re-assess the situation and to formulate alternative scripts. For both groups, there were potentially two options.¹³⁰ The first possibility was to replace the old strategy with a new, potentially more effective, violent strategy: al-Zawahiri and a portion of the EIJ 'exiles', for example, followed bin Laden's script of attacking the 'far enemy'. The second option was to reject violence completely in preference for alternative, non-violent strategies for pursuing political ambitions. In the event, both organisations adopted a non-violent 'de-mobilisation' script in order to pursue their political ends and it is this script which is the focus of the remainder of the chapter.

¹²⁹ These figures are taken from Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*: 85-86.

¹³⁰ Conceivably, either organisation could have re-evaluated their political goals in an effort to render them more attainable. Not surprisingly, bearing in mind the fact that both were deeply committed to their political ambitions, this did not appeal to either.

Bearing in mind the fact that the EIG had signalled their increased commitment to violence by escalating their scripts between 1992 and 1997, the rapid de-mobilisation of this group has elicited much academic interest, normally with a view to examining ways in which the de-mobilisation script might be implanted into other countries in the fight against al-Qa'ida.¹³¹ Broadly speaking, these theories on the EIG's disengagement can be usefully put into one of three camps. For some, it was solely the consequence of negotiation and dedicated post-arrest de-radicalisation efforts on the part of the Egyptian regime.¹³² For some, it was a process of ideological revisionism undertaken by the EIG, with the regime playing only a supplementary role as a facilitator.¹³³ For others, this was a process which started in the EIG leadership but which was nurtured and propagated by negotiation and de-radicalisation strategies deployed by the regime.¹³⁴ It is useful to identify three major themes which characterise this material in order to identify some broad issues with theories of de-radicalisation before proceeding to examine the scripts in more detail.

Common to all these studies is the notion that state repression played a part in the EIG's disengagement.¹³⁵ Rashwan, for example, argues that 'the severe security strategy shook the ranks and cohesion of the Gama'a, prompting a reconsideration of its acts and concepts'.¹³⁶ Ashour echoes this, noting that 'historical leaders have referred to state repression as a cause for revising their behavior and their ideology' because it forced the EIG to 'reassess the costs and benefits of violently confronting the Egyptian regime'.¹³⁷ Part of the problem with this is that repression was the standard Government response to Islamist violence and that groups

¹³¹ See, in particular, Hamed El-Said and Jane Harrigan, *Deradicalising Violent Extremists: Counter-Radicalisation and Deradicalisation Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States* (Routledge, 2012); Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*.

¹³² Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*; Rohan Gunaratna and Mohamed Bin Ali, 'De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt: A Preliminary Insight', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 4 (2009).

¹³³ Stein, 'An Uncivil Partnership: Egypt's Jama'a Islamiyya and the state after the Jihad'; Nicole Stracke, 'Arab prisons: A place for dialogue and reform', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 1, no. 4 (2010). Blaydes and Rubin, 'Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt'.

¹³⁴ Hamed el-Said, 'De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and Their Impact in Muslim Majority States,' (The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), 2012); El-Said and Harrigan, *Deradicalising Violent Extremists*; Dia'a Rashwan, 'The Renunciation of Violence by Egyptian Jihadi Organizations,' in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London: Routledge, 2009); Dia'a Rashwan, 'The Obstacle Course of Revisions: Gamaah versus Jihad,' *al-Ahram Commentary* (Cairo: al-Ahram Centre for Political and Security Studies, 2007); Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*; Ashour, 'De-radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda'. Blaydes, 2008 #439

¹³⁵ See e.g. Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 98-101; Gunaratna and Ali, 'De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt', 288; Rashwan, 'The Renunciation of Violence,' 121f.

¹³⁶ Rashwan, 'The Renunciation of Violence,' 124.

¹³⁷ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 100.

like the EIG had experienced similar behaviour since their emergence in the 1970s without showing any sign of de-mobilising. Indeed to the contrary, it was precisely because repression brought about the capture and torture of their co-religionists and prevented their participation in the political system that Islamists resorted to violence: a 1992 document produced by the EIG, to take one example, states that violence is a reaction to 'the execution of some of the leaders of the Jama'a and the torture of Jama'a members under arrest'.¹³⁸

There is also general acknowledgment in these studies that 'leadership matters': charismatic leaders who are trusted by the ranks, so the argument goes, are needed if authoritative disengagement messages are to be disseminated to a reluctant membership.¹³⁹ Blaydes and Rubin note that 'by allowing the EIG to remain cohesive within the prisons, the regime was able to use the leadership council of the group to disseminate changes to ideology once those ideological transformations had been made'.¹⁴⁰ Ashour takes this much further, arguing that 'the charismatic leadership of an armed Islamic organisation seems to be the decisive factor in the success or failure of any de-radicalisation process'.¹⁴¹ Whilst this may be true – strategies always have to be communicated throughout an organisation if they are to be followed – it is, perhaps, simplistic. The evidence from the case studies suggests that charismatic leaders have as much difficulty at convincing others to follow their strategic visions as anyone else, or to put it less bluntly, charismatic leaders may be highly respected and trusted whilst still failing to unify an organisation's actions. al-Zawahiri, for example, presumably fitting the definition of a charismatic leader, failed on several occasions to persuade the EIJ that attacking the far enemy was preferable to attacking the near. Even Hasan al-Banna, who was so respected by the Muslim Brotherhood that even after his execution, he 'remained, in full measure, the final and unqualified authority in the Society', was unable to convince the Secret Apparatus of the advantages of restraint. The point is underscored by Freedman who argues that:

¹³⁸ Cited in Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel*: 87; see also Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention.'; and, in a different context Araj, 'Harsh State Repression as a Cause of Suicide Bombing: The Case of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict'.

¹³⁹ To borrow a phrase from Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 91-96. Little, the close reader of this study will note, is said about what constitutes the charismatic leader and, surprisingly, no reference is made to Weber, arguably the standard theorist on charisma, in Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, trans. Talcott Parsons and A. M. Henderson (Martino Fine Books, 2012). Indeed, Ashour goes no further than citing the work of Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*; and Caron Gentry, 'The relationship between New Social Movement theory and terrorism studies: The role of leadership, membership, ideology and gender', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 2 (2004).

¹⁴⁰ Blaydes and Rubin, 'Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt', 470; see also Lisa Blaydes, 'Makram Mohammed Ahmed Interviews the Historic Leadership of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya inside the 'Scorpion' Prison,' (n.p., 2004).

¹⁴¹ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 138.

Even a charismatic leader may have numerous interpreters who will be influenced by specific circumstances. Attempts to make authoritative pronouncements may therefore be the outcome of a process of strategic reasoning shared by a few and poorly understood by sympathizers and supporters.... If a leader decides that terrorism is not working and something else must be tried, or asks militants to exercise restraint while negotiations are explored, then erstwhile followers can form a new group or follow another leader who is urging no compromise.¹⁴²

The third and final point to note about theories of de-mobilisation is that they emphasise debate as a central factor in disengagement. Stracke notes that the primary reason for the success of the Egyptian 'de-radicalisation' programme was that the authorities facilitated 'the many and long meetings that took place between the leaders of the organization and its members'.¹⁴³ El-Said similarly notes that '[a]lthough the government did not initiate the reforms, it nonetheless played an important role in facilitating the *muraja'h* (revision) process among imprisoned leaders and members once it started... [by permitting] dialogue, debate and meetings inside prisons between the leaders, their members, and other secular and political prisoners'.¹⁴⁴ al-Zayyat suggested 'In prison, they were exposed to other ideas and teachings and began accepting different opinions. It had to do with knowledge and experience'.¹⁴⁵ Ashour takes this a little further, arguing that 'external interaction [e.g. between the EIG and other political groups] has mostly affected the historical leadership's behavioural and ideological transformations, whereas internal interaction [e.g. between the leadership and lower ranks] has mostly affected the members'.¹⁴⁶ Once again, there may be an element of truth to this, but it is not clear how this form of debate differs from any other type of discussion over strategy and ideology: bearing in mind that, in the first chapter, it was argued that the considerable gulf between limited resources and political ambitions means that violent Islamists spend a great deal of time debating (and falling out over) their strategy and ideology, it seems unlikely that this near-permanent feature of violent Islamist groups should be a prerequisite for de-radicalisation.

The De-mobilisation of the EIG and the Communication of Strategic Change

It was during a military tribunal in April 1996 that Khaled Ibrahim, part of the EIG's leadership and former commander of Aswan, called for the unilateral cessation of terrorist

¹⁴² Freedman, 'Terrorism as a Strategy', 336-37.

¹⁴³ Stracke, 'Arab prisons: A place for dialogue and reform'.

¹⁴⁴ el-Said, 'De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and Their Impact in Muslim Majority States,' 18.

¹⁴⁵ Personal Interview cited in Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 34.

¹⁴⁶ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 96.

violence.¹⁴⁷ Just over a year later, on 5 July 1997, Muhammed al-Amin Abdul Alim similarly took the opportunity of using his trial as a publicity tool to announce that six members of the EIG leadership had signed a document which formally rejected violence and stated their intention to pursue peaceful forms of political involvement.¹⁴⁸ Although the document was originally meant to be secret and thus the announcement caught the historic leadership by surprise, they supported the statement and began to publicise their commitment to strategic change by releasing a series of published texts which received broad distribution amongst EIG prisoners and which were further disseminated beyond the prisons in interviews with journalists.¹⁴⁹ These went hand-in-hand with visits to various prisons where violent Islamists would be gathered in the courtyards to listen to lectures from their now non-violent leaders.

Not that the ceasefire was universally popular. EIG elements, particularly those in the south, resented being told what to do by a leadership who had spent more than fifteen years in prison and responded to the Non-Violence Initiative with the attack on the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor in November 1997 which left 62 dead. Although the EIG leadership later described this as a 'hard stab in the back' and explained that those 'in hiding and operating in remote Upper Egypt areas did not hear about the declaration and carried on with an older order given to them in 1996', the sheer brutality and intensity of the attack (which involved the death of infants and the disembowelling of victims with machetes) marks it out as unique

¹⁴⁷ Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya,' 208-09; Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 92.

¹⁴⁸ El-Said and Harrigan, *Deradicalising Violent Extremists*; Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*; Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya.'; Rashwan, 'The Renunciation of Violence.'

¹⁴⁹ Numbers vary: six is suggested by Blaydes and Rubin, 'Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt'. Four is proposed by Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 51. Twenty-seven is proposed by Rashwan who argues that only four were approved by the leadership, Rashwan, 'The Renunciation of Violence,' 126. Sherman Jackson, 'Beyond Jihad: the New Thought of the Gamā'a Islāmiyya', *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2009): 57 argues along the same lines. During fieldwork, the author found six books: Usamah Hafiz, Muhammad Asim Abd al-Majid, and Karam al-Zuhdi, *Mubadarat waqf al-unf: ru'yah waqi'iyah wa nazrah shar'iyah* [An Initiative for Stopping Violence: A Practical Vision and Legal Framework] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2002); Karam al-Zuhdi, *Istiratijiyyat wa taffirat al-Qa'idah: al-akhta' wal-akhtar* [The Strategy and Bombings of al-Qa'ida: Dangers and Mistakes] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2004); Hamdi al-Rahman et al., *Taslit al-Adwa ala ma waqa'a fil-jihad min akhta* [Shining a Light on the Mistakes of the Jihad] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2002); Ibrahim Najih, *Hurmat al-ghulu fi al-din wa takfir al-Muslimin* [The Illegality of Excess in Declaring Muslims Apostate] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2002); Ibrahim Najih and Ali Sharif, *Taffirat al-Riyad: al-Ahkam wal-athar* [The Bombings in Riyadh: Rulings and Effects] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2003); Ali Sharif, *Nahr al-dhirkrayat: al-muraja'at al-fiqhiyah lil-Jama'a al-Islamiya* [The River of Memories: Interpretative Revision in the Gama'a Islamiyya] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 2003). For interviews, see Lisa Blaydes' translation of the interview of the EIG with the editor of *al-Musawwar*, Makram Mohammed Ahmed. Blaydes, 'Makram Mohammed Ahmed Interviews the Historic Leadership of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya inside the 'Scorpion' Prison.'

in the history of EIG violence.¹⁵⁰ The message in the massacre was clear: some in the EIG remained committed to the coercive logic of violence and those who thought likewise should join them.

Indeed, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it seems that much of the EIG were reluctant to follow the de-mobilisation script (although the brief support of Sheikh Umar Abd al-Rahman from jail in the US convinced many of its strategic and religious wisdom). As one EIG middle-ranker put it: 'we would ask individual members to comply, but between us, we still did not agree'.¹⁵¹ On top of dissent in the middle ranks, more senior leaders simply rejected the 'de-mobilisation' script: Muhammad al-Islambuli refused to support the Non-Violence Initiative as did Rifa'i Taha who not only rebuffed it but demonstrated his continued belief in violence by signing bin Laden's International Islamic Front on behalf of the EIG in 1998 – an act which saw him dismissed from the EIG *shura* council. Other violent Islamists outside the EIG lent their voices to the chorus, arguing that they had 'simply surrendered to the Government, betraying the cause and hence the entire movement'.¹⁵² al-Zawahiri, for example, released statements in 1996 and 1997, the latter imploring the EIG not 'to give the regime a chance to buy time [or] to dissuade Muslim youth [from the cause]', as well as devoting portions of his 2001 book, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner* to criticising the EIG's de-mobilisation.

There were essentially three elements to the strategic revision. In the first place, the EIG were clear that violence was simply a means for achieving political goals and, so the argument ran, because violence had failed to achieve those goals alternative strategies needed to be found. This was couched in both strategic and ideological terms. Hamdi Abd al-Rahman, for example, presented a pragmatic argument:

We used to engage in jihad without taking any account of the benefit or harms that would be incurred by our actions. Now, however, our understanding has changed: it is the broader aims and objectives that determine the application of the text. So if the text says, e.g. wage war against the Jews, I must first determine...

¹⁵⁰ Jackson, 'Beyond Jihad: the New Thought of the Gamā'a Islāmiyya', 56. Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 51. The idea that EIG elements had not heard about the ceasefire seems unlikely to have been the case, not least because it was plastered over the newspapers and, more importantly, because five months had passed between the declaration of non-violence and the massacre – ample time for instructions to be passed on to even the most remote of militants. The point about this attack standing out in the history of Egyptian violence was made by the EIG leadership in their written material Hafiz, al-Majid, and al-Zuhdi, *Mubadarat waqf al-unf: ru'yah waqi'iyah wa nazrah shar'iyah* [An Initiative for Stopping Violence: A Practical Vision and Legal Framework]: 7f.

¹⁵¹ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 98.

¹⁵² Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 34.

[whether] my interests will be realised by fighting or by not fighting. This is the sound approach.¹⁵³

For Abd al-Rahman, violence, even if prescribed by Islamic texts, can only be deployed if it will bring about desired goals. This is a fundamentally strategic argument which involves examining goals, weighing up options and identifying the most suitable way to achieve those goals. The major revisionist text translated the same idea into the ideological realm, arguing in religio-strategic terms that '*jihad* is neither the goal nor the intent. *Jihad* is the way to raise the banner of religion and God's word. And if *jihad* is unable to achieve that, it is forbidden [*haram*]'.¹⁵⁴ In this sense, *jihad* was a form of 'propaganda of the deed' and if it failed in that respect, it was not only strategically counter-productive but religiously proscribed. From the strategic perspective, then, violence had been unsuccessful in achieving political ambitions and therefore non-violent scripts needed to be pursued. This, however, was coated in an ideological veneer: *jihad* is only permitted if it can bring about political ambitions, and because the EIG's *jihad* had failed to realise interests, violence is not only strategically illogical, but forbidden in Islam.

In the second place, the EIG argue that violence has not only been unsuccessful and therefore forbidden but has actually been counter-productive, uniting their enemies, fracturing Egyptian society and, in so doing, rendering their political ambitions all the more difficult to realise. The EIG's main text, for example, *Initiative for Stopping Violence [Mubadarat waqf al-unf]*, states that 'it is obvious that in the fight between Islamic groups and the police, neither one can benefit. The state cannot benefit from the lasting violence. However, the biggest benefactors in the struggle within Egypt are the enemies of Egypt and Islam'.¹⁵⁵ Nageh Ibrahim asked rhetorically 'was it sensible to wage war against the world at large? Was it sensible to increase the number of enemies against Islam?'.¹⁵⁶ Hassan al-Khalifa echoes this, saying:

When I entered into the confrontation with the state, I was thinking that this confrontation with the system would, through pressure,

¹⁵³ Jackson, 'Beyond Jihad: the New Thought of the Gamā'a Islāmiyya', 61.

¹⁵⁴ Hafiz, al-Majid, and al-Zuhdi, *Mubadarat waqf al-unf: ru'yah waqi'iyah wa nazrah shar'iyah* [An Initiative for Stopping Violence: A Practical Vision and Legal Framework]; this is also quoted in El-Said and Harrigan, *Deradicalising Violent Extremists*: 83. For an interesting Islamist perspective on *haram* see Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful And The Prohibited In Islam* (Islamic Books, 1997).

¹⁵⁵ Hafiz, al-Majid, and al-Zuhdi, *Mubadarat waqf al-unf: ru'yah waqi'iyah wa nazrah shar'iyah* [An Initiative for Stopping Violence: A Practical Vision and Legal Framework]: 35; this translation is from Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 35.

¹⁵⁶ Najih, *Hurmat al-ghulu fi al-din wa takfir al-Muslimin* [The Illegality of Excess in Declaring Muslims Apostate]: 4.

lead to a solution of the problems of the country and eliminate corruption and free prisoners. But after that, it became clear to me ... that confrontation had caused great harm instead of helping the country; it ruined everything and no good was realised from it.¹⁵⁷

The argument, in basic terms, is that violence has not only been unsuccessful, but that it has been self-refuting, both because it has damaged Egyptian society and because it has created a united front of the enemies of the EIG.

The third element is perhaps the most important. The EIG leadership were absolutely explicit that, although their strategy had changed, their political ambitions remained essentially the same. Goerzig agrees, arguing that the EIG 'did not change its ends of confronting the enemies of Islam substantially. What it changed are its means... The EIG reinterpreted *jihad*'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Khalid Ibrahim's speech which marked the beginning of the implementation of demobilisation, was just as extreme, ideologically speaking, as other EIG speeches of the early 1990s. 'We should all combat this sedition', he said, 'by turning the blood that was shed through fighting between people of one nation into constructive work that can extend our civilization... let's turn these torn-off limbs into bricks that can build your glory and your fort to protect you from your many enemies, especially Israel'; he went on to call for a year-long ceasefire to prepare for confrontation with Israel on behalf of Egypt.¹⁵⁹ The EIG leadership were equally clear about their new political role when they asked Montassir al-Zayyat to make a statement describing their future role, which similarly makes reference to a potentially devastating threat to Egypt:

1. There should be an outlet for Islamic groups through a political and *da'wa* [sic] entity that calls people to Islam and fights external power and their destructive ideas.
2. Islamic groups should be granted all the freedoms and rights to which they are entitled according to the Egyptian constitution. This would eliminate any reason for taking up arms.¹⁶⁰

Despite EIG (and Goerzig's) claims to the contrary, a careful examination of the quotations above suggests that there is a subtle but significant shift. Embedded in both quotations is the notion that the EIG aims to unify the Islamic community against an unspecified external force

¹⁵⁷ Blaydes, 'Makram Mohammed Ahmed Interviews the Historic Leadership of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya inside the 'Scorpion' Prison,' 12-13.

¹⁵⁸ Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 35.

¹⁵⁹ al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*: 63; Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 35f.

¹⁶⁰ al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*: 76.

and its destructive ideas. Their major revisionist text elucidates the idea further, describing an *éminence grise* who profits 'at the expense of Egyptian blood', namely, 'Israel, the US and the West'.¹⁶¹ Although the EIG had never been particularly fond of Israel or the West, much of its vitriol had been reserved for the Egyptian regime. However, after the declaration of the ceasefire, it is noticeable that the government is rarely the object of EIG criticism, let alone venom. This is not surprising – clearly the EIG could no longer be seen to oppose the regime lest their fragile claim to non-violence be compromised – but it did mean that, if their non-violence initiative was to persuade the organisation that this was solely a change in the way that political goals were pursued rather than a change in the goals themselves, the EIG leadership had to search for a new target.

The point about these three elements is that they were designed to communicate strategic change in the most persuasive fashion possible. The skeleton of the argument was straightforward: violence has been unsuccessful and is therefore *haram*; violence has not only been unsuccessful but counter-productive; and yet political goals broadly speaking remain the same and must be pursued in some fashion. In the event, the argument was extremely effective, largely because it was straightforward and because it framed de-mobilisation as both a strategic advantage and religious imperative.¹⁶² The message was adopted, not always eagerly, throughout the organisation and, with the exception of the Luxor attack, the leadership successfully de-mobilised their group, returning to their original non-violent strategies of achieving political ends, namely *da'awa* and *hisba*; in 2011, after the release of most of the historic leadership, the EIG added a further political element to their 'de-mobilisation' script by forming the Building and Development Party [*Hizb al-Banna' w'al-Tanmia*] and participating in parliamentary elections.¹⁶³

De-mobilisation, Emulation and the EIJ

Although the EIJ's decline was, for the most part, a consequence of the organisational fracture described in length in the previous section, it was hastened by the EIG's calls for non-violent strategies. The fact that the EIG's de-mobilisation narrative was so compelling was of considerable concern to al-Zawahiri in particular, who recognised that he was not only losing control over the EIJ, but its main rival was presenting coherent arguments for rejecting violence. Indeed, so concerned was he that he sought to counter the EIG's 'de-mobilisation

¹⁶¹ Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 35.

¹⁶² On frames, see Robert Benford and David Snow, 'Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology* (2000).

¹⁶³ Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya.'

narrative' by devoting large portions of his 2001 book, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, in an effort to portray members of the EIG leadership as little more than government lackeys.¹⁶⁴ al-Zawahiri's concern was not ill-placed. By late 1997, EIJ regional commanders had begun to follow the example of the EIG by calling on their followers to 'put out the fires of civil strife between the state and some of its citizens'.¹⁶⁵ By 2000, there were growing calls for a non-violence initiative in the style of the EIG and members of the leadership were openly advocating the rejection of violence. Although the process stuttered to a halt in 2005, it was revived in 2007, when Dr. Fadl manufactured a credible 'de-mobilisation narrative' in the form of a book, *The Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World*. Here, he deployed both his prestige and authority to call for the complete disengagement of the group from all military activity.¹⁶⁶ This narrative, produced by one of the foremost Egyptian violent Islamist ideologues, was widely received – by supporters and detractors of non-violence in the EIJ alike – as a valid statement of strategic and religious reasons for disengagement.

Not surprisingly, there were marked similarities between the de-mobilisations of the EIG and the EIJ. Firstly, the process of revision was structured around the publication of revisionist material, namely Dr. Fadl's book and prior to that the EIG texts, both of which espoused the benefits of non-violent strategies. Indeed, there were significant similarities in the content of the two texts, particularly over the strategic and religious justifications for rejecting violence. For Dr. Fadl, the essential point is, as Hamzawy and Grebowksi have argued, that '[if] Jihadists do not possess strength comparable to that of their enemies (whether rulers in Muslim countries who do not rule in accordance with Islam or foreign powers occupying Muslim countries), [then] they are forbidden from acting violently against these powers'.¹⁶⁷

Secondly, the process was facilitated, once again, through tours of prisons to disseminate their de-mobilisation narrative and to verify and legitimise the strategic shift.¹⁶⁸ Thirdly, the EIJ did not fundamentally restructure their political vision: there was still great antagonism towards 'malignant Zionist hands' and infidel regimes which failed to implement *shari'a*. Mohammed al-Ghazlani, the EIJ *emir* in Giza, for example, said in his trial of 1998 that:

¹⁶⁴ A charge that he denies at considerable length. al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*: 79f.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶⁶ Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, *Wathiqat Tarshid al-Jihad fi Misr wal-Alam* [Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World] (Al-Jarida, 2007); see also Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*: 37; El-Said and Harrigan, *Deradicalising Violent Extremists*: 89.

¹⁶⁷ Amr Hamzawy and Sarah Grebowksi, 'From Violence to Moderation: Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad,' *Carnegie Papers* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), 7.

¹⁶⁸ Blaydes, 'Makram Mohammed Ahmed Interviews the Historic Leadership of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya inside the 'Scorpion' Prison,' 20.

International Zionism, the most active of the three conspirators against our Muslim and Arab nation, is behind this civil strife in Egypt. There are malignant Zionist hands behind any destruction that happens... The Jews will benefit from civil strife in Egypt because this will assure that Egyptian officials are too busy with their internal affairs to notice the Jews conspiracies and expansionist schemes... they want a Mediterranean market in which Zionism controls the whole region... I hope that these efforts [the Non-Violence Initiative] will help unite our nation to face up to the grave dangers besetting us.¹⁶⁹

However, there was a critical difference between the EIJ and the EIG. The historic leadership of the latter was essentially unified over the decision to reject violence and could therefore formulate a clear and persuasive argument for pursuing that course of action. By contrast, the EIJ was under the authority of a fragmented, dispersed leadership: al-Zawahiri had effectively moved to bin Laden's World Islamic Front, taking the few EIJ members who wanted to target the 'far' enemy with him. Dr. Fadl had not been formally involved in the EIJ leadership since 1993, though he was respected as a theoretician and ideologue. Abbud al-Zumr, the deputy *emir* in the days of Abd al-Salam Farag, had washed his hands of EIJ entirely in the mid-1990s as al-Zawahiri marginalised him and had been co-opted into the *shura* council of the EIG. To make matters worse, by 1998, the EIJ was essentially 'composed of a multiple loosely related cells each with its own commander and taking different stances of deradicalization and offering allegiance to different factional leaders'.¹⁷⁰

The fact that the EIJ's leadership was fragmented and its membership was divided into a series of disconnected cells meant that a clear narrative could not be formulated or disseminated to the other ranks until 2007.¹⁷¹ Without a formal de-mobilisation narrative, a unified leadership or coherent structure, de-mobilisation took nearly a decade to be adopted, by which time elements of the EIJ, far from disengaging, had relinquished their membership of the group and joined al-Qa'ida and its various affiliates or formed small clusters of violent Islamists in the Sinai.¹⁷² Nevertheless, for those who did disengage the logic was clear: they recognised that, if the EIG, a much larger, more united and more popular movement, had spent years involved in an intense long-term campaign in an attempt to achieve their political ambitions and still failed to coerce the regime into instituting their political demands, then the EIJ, by contrast, smaller, less popular and less unified, would almost certainly fail as well.

¹⁶⁹ al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda*: 78.

¹⁷⁰ El-Said and Harrigan, *Deradicalising Violent Extremists*: 89.

¹⁷¹ Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*: 103f.

¹⁷² A violent Islamist movement, called Ansar al-Sharia, is beginning to emerge in the Sinai. It was mentioned in two informal conversations with security officials as being primarily the work of the young and disaffected rather than the older EIJ membership.

Confronted with the inevitable failure of strategic violence, these elements found the EIG's and, later, Dr. Fadl's de-mobilisation narrative – that non-violent methods were ideologically more appropriate and strategically more likely to achieve political ambitions – highly convincing.

De-Mobilisation as Strategic Choice

The de-mobilisation script, then consists of two stages: the first stage is to formulate a compelling argument that non-violent strategies are (religiously, ideologically, strategically, politically and so on) better than violent strategies. The second stage is to communicate this to those who need to be de-mobilised. Although this sounds straightforward, like other scripts, it is often deceptively difficult in practice. Compelling arguments have to work on multiple audiences: on the one hand, they must persuade allies to reject violence and on the other, they must convince oppositions that strategic change is genuine and that the organisation no longer presents a threat.

A persuasive argument, however, is useless unless it is communicated effectively. Arguments which are communicated in such a way that they leave room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation are likely not to be followed or at least only followed by some. Formulating and disseminating these arguments, particularly if, like the EIG, an organisation does not blindly follow commands, requires deliberation and diligence. In this sense, de-mobilisation is decidedly a product of System 2 decision-making and is thus a calculated strategic choice. This is an important point, because it distinguishes de-mobilisation (a strategic decision to reject violence which requires persuasive arguments to be communicated successfully to one's terrorist organisation if it is to follow the prescribed course of action) from the related but converse process of 'de-radicalisation' (the strategy employed by governments to persuade terrorist organisations to reject violence or to recast their political goals).

From this perspective, the EIG made a strategic choice to reject violence and to adopt non-violent courses of action in pursuing their political ends. In order to communicate this, they formulated a simple but persuasive argument that violence had been unsuccessful, counter-productive and thus must be pursued by non-violent methods; this was then given an ideological varnish – what Benford and Snow refer to as a 'motivational framing' – to provide 'a compelling account for engaging in collective action and for sustaining their

participation'.¹⁷³ That the EIG's de-mobilisation narrative was both well-formulated and well-communicated is evident in the fact that it was taken up by some factions in the EIJ. Of course, the compelling arguments were not specifically formulated for the EIJ and thus the script took some years to be pursued formally, but the point is that the de-mobilisation script was sufficiently persuasive to influence the behaviour of others for whom it was not intended. These elements essentially 'borrowed' the EIG's de-mobilisation script. Like the EIG, they retained their political ambitions, they re-used and re-cycled elements of the EIG's arguments not only through meetings with EIG leaders, but in Dr. Fadl's revisionist text and they sought to disseminate this narrative by touring the prisons.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Egyptian Islamist groups selected a range of strategic scripts in the pursuit of their political ends. The Secret Apparatus followed the 'fight' strand of the survival script to force the regime to reconsider repression because the costs of confronting the Brotherhood outweighed the benefits. Other organisations which emerged on the fringes of the Brotherhood, such as *Takfir wal-Hijra* and the Military Academy Group, recognised that the gulf between means and ends was too great for confronting the regime and opted for the 'flight' strand of the survival script in an effort to increase their resources. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Abd al-Salam Farag envisaged decapitating the regime and inciting an Islamic revolution in a mobilisation script; by contrast, Karam al-Zuhdi imagined a terrorist war of attrition which would drive out the Coptic community and the regime and thus create a truly Islamic mini-state from which to wage an insurgency. As an opportunity to assassinate Sadat arose, these two strategic visions became hybridised in the embryonic *Tanzim al-Jihad*: the assassination of Sadat was to be followed by the overthrow of state security structures in the south and these two stimuli would fuel an Islamic revolution which would overthrow the remnants of the regime. As the Afghan *jihad* came to an end, the EIG regrouped in Egypt, redeploying the attritional script and subsequently escalating it in the face of regime intransigence. al-Zawahiri recognised that the strategic fractures emerging in the EIJ were a consequence of his growing desire to attack the far enemy and sought to heal these rifts by deploying extreme forms of violence in an effort to signal his resolve and commitment to violence against the regime in Egypt. And, as the scripts of the EIG and the EIJ failed, both

¹⁷³ Benford and Snow, 'Framing processes and social movements', 617f; Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 363-70.

opted for the de-mobilisation script, seeking to pursue their political goals through non-violent means.

These scripts were all born from the need to find ways to attenuate the gap between the relatively meagre means available to violent Islamists and their ambitious political goals. Some scripts – survival, co-operation, power play and de-mobilisation – were deployed with the aim of getting to the next stage of the confrontation with equal or greater resources than possessed at the outset. Other scripts – mobilisation and attrition – aimed to maximise the resources available by raising the coercive ‘volume’ of their political demands. Nevertheless, the pervasive problem faced by violent Islamists was that the gap between their means and their ambitious ends was too wide to be bridged. Some violent Islamist groups, the EIG in particular, attempted to deal with this problem by escalating their strategies. By increasing the lethality, intensity and scope of violence, so the logic ran, terrorism would increase coercive leverage, capture greater popular attention and, consequently, force the regime to concede. Other violent Islamists reassessed the situation and, concluding that their existing script was either ineffective or inappropriate, sought alternative, potentially more effective, scripts.

Despite violent Islamist efforts, however, their strategies were essentially ineffective in achieving their long-term aims. Indeed, Thomas Schelling’s observation that ‘despite the high ratio of damage and grief to the resources required for a terrorist act, terrorism has proved to be a remarkably ineffectual means to accomplishing anything’ certainly seems to apply in this case study.¹⁷⁴ As has been suggested, there was a persistent ‘strategic gap’ between the way in which violent Islamists expected scripts to unfold and the way a situation took shape in practice. This occurred on numerous occasions: the Secret Apparatus’ script failed to force the regime to leave it alone, the *Tanzim al-Jihad*’s visions of inciting a popular revolution through the assassination of Sadat failed to initiate mass protests and the EIG’s plan to coerce the regime through an attritional war was met with full-blooded retribution rather than half-hearted concessions.

The disparity between strategic vision and strategic action, at least for Egyptian violent Islamists was not just a consequence of failures in implementing terrorism as a strategy, though doubtless these existed – *Tanzim al-Jihad*’s strategy, for example, might have worked had the Sa’idi grouping been able to attack security centres in the south at the right moment.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Schelling, ‘What Purposes Can ‘International Terrorism’ Serve?’, in *Violence, Terrorism and Justice*, ed. Raymond Gillespie Frey and Christopher W. Morris (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

The greater problem lay in violent Islamist scripts themselves. Specifically, the chapter identified three flaws in their scripts. The first flaw was that scripts generally underplayed the extent of the gap between means and ends with the consequence that goals appeared attainable when in reality they were essentially inaccessible. The best illustration of this was *Takfir wal-Hijra* who, after some years of patiently gathering supporters, attempted to coerce the regime to concede to a set of limited, short-term demands by kidnapping Muhammed al-Dhahabi. The regime response was so swift and uncompromising that it effectively obliterated the organisation within months. This provides an indication of a broader problem in terrorist script formation: scripts govern decision-making by providing a set of expectations about the likely outcome of events; if scripts gloss over the tension between means and ends, or, more broadly, are based on erroneous assumption, then they can only make fallacious predictions and force bad decision-making.

The second problem with violent Islamist scripts was that they oversimplified the complex relationship between cause and effect. This was less of a problem when the intended chain of events is relatively short, for example in the survival and de-mobilisation scripts, but it is a significant problem when it is long. In the EIG's attrition script, for example, repeated acts of violence were intended to coerce Coptic communities and security forces to leave particular territories whilst encouraging others to remain until, eventually, specific areas of the south had become sufficiently and properly Islamic that an insurgent war could be implemented from safe havens. The difficulty is that other parties may choose to act in ways for which the script has not taken account (e.g. repression and reprisals) or follow their own, completely different scripts.

The final problem with violent Islamist scripts was that because they are relatively simple structures that described the way in which strategists might expect events to unfold, they were extremely easy to transfer. On a number of occasions in the case study, organisations adopted scripts or portions of scripts which they believed had the potential for success and to adapt, reject or replace those elements which they saw as flawed. To this end, the Secret Apparatus adopted assassination as part of their survival script because they operated in an environment in which assassination was rife; the EIG envisaged an insurgency, drawn to the strategy by the stories of successful insurgencies waged in the desert by the PLO; time and again, Abd al-Salam Farag and Abbud al-Zumr would argue that they sought to emulate the model of the Iranian Revolution precisely because it had so effectively side-stepped state security who were unable to fire on their own people.

The problem with this was not just that violent Islamists emulated the strategic scripts of others without taking account of differences in political, strategic, social, economic (to name a few) contexts. The real problem was that violent Islamists were deriving their scripts from stories told about (and by) other movements in confrontation with their regime. In this sense, Egyptian violent Islamists suffered from what this research refers to as 'narrative delusion'. These groups were convinced of the accuracy and reliability of their scripts because they were derived from compelling accounts of other violent Islamists and their successes (and occasionally failures) in coercing their oppositions. As we shall see in the final concluding chapter, the trouble with stories, to echo Charles Tilly, is that they can be misleading.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Charles Tilly, 'The Trouble With Stories,' in *Stories, Identity and Political Change*, ed. Charles Tilly (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

Chapter 3

New Scripts from Old Stories: Provocation, Attrition and the Search for Legitimacy in Saudi Arabia

This type of diplomacy [terrorism] is normally written in blood, decorated with corpses, and perfumed with gunpowder. It has a political meaning connected to the nature of the ideological struggle. That is, it is considered the way to send messages to multiple audiences. Therefore, the choice of targets must be made extremely carefully.

-- Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin¹

If the story of violent Islamism in Egypt is one of a long campaign of violence which moved gradually towards its apex in the early 1990s and rapidly dwindled, then the story of violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia is one of a short campaign which flared, sputtered and died in quick succession. But during its ephemeral existence, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in its Saudi phase explored their strategic options in great detail.² They calculated that, if terrorism was to be both means- and ends-focused – in the sense that it was designed both to lure in new recruits and mobilise support as well as to pursue political objectives by coercing near and far enemies – then the objects of violence needed to be chosen with due care. The dilemma, recognised by both bin Laden and AQAP leaders, was that the population were not likely to bestow their political blessing on an organisation which attacked them. These leaders spent much energy attempting to solve this 'targeting dilemma' and, in response, essentially produced two scripts: attrition and provocation.

It is this singular focus on means and ends, targets and audiences which provides fertile territory in which to examine how AQAP made decisions about its strategies. Specifically, this chapter asks how the Saudi violent Islamist movement's scripts were constructed, how its strategists envisaged these scripts reaching their desired outcomes and how their strategies unfolded in practice. In order to answer these questions, this chapter begins by focusing on the way in which the attitudes of both bin Laden and Saudi Arabia's non-violent Islamist movement towards the regime changed throughout the 1990s and how these changes

¹ Translated by Norman Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency: Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin's "a Practical Course for Guerrilla War"* (Potomac Books Inc., 2009). 127.

² al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula is a moniker that has also been adopted by an organisation in Yemen. As we shall see in the next chapter, this was a deliberate manoeuvre designed to suggest continuity between the organisation in Saudi Arabia and its latest incarnation in Yemen. I do not differentiate between the groups by providing multiple acronyms which can become confusing. Where clarity is needed, I refer to 'AQAP in Saudi Arabia' and 'AQAP in Yemen'; in all other cases, the AQAP mentioned is the one which operated in the case study country.

significantly influenced his strategic vision for the Peninsula. The second part of this chapter examines the emergence of two contrasting strategic visions in the networks of Yusuf al-Uyayri and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri and examines how these two visions were derived from scripts whose assumptions were flawed. The third section focuses on the 'campaign of violence' deployed by AQAP between 2003 and 2005 under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin and explores the structure and flaws in his three-stage script. The fourth part of the chapter examines the Saudi regime's strategic responses to Islamist violence, focusing in particular on the search for legitimacy. The chapter concludes by examining a number of assumptions in the scripts formulated by the violent Islamists and examines how these assumptions were translated into failed strategy, producing the 'strategic gap'.

Bin Laden, *al-Sahwa* and the Origins of Provocation

Throughout the 1980s, bin Laden was absolutely clear that violent Islamists should avoid attacking the House of Saud in word or in deed.³ Part of this derived from the fact that he saw himself, in the words of journalist Steve Coll, as 'an international Islamic guerrilla leader who worked in the service of his king – someone so loyal to the Al-Saud that he even tried to think ahead on their behalf'.⁴ Iraq's invasion of Kuwait changed everything: as a loyal subject, bin Laden promised the regime 100,000 *mujahideen* to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.⁵ His offer, however, was rejected and with the rejection of that offer, he gradually turned against the ruling family.⁶ For bin Laden it was not simply that his services had been passed over for the military power of the US, it was that he had 'exposed the infidel's great role in the Arabian Peninsula and depth of the religious institutions' hypocrisy'.⁷ His speeches went from mild critique to vociferous opposition and his relationship with the ruling family declined as they increasingly felt that he had changed from 'a calm, peaceful and gentle man interested in

³ A point made by Bruce Riedel and Bilal Saab, 'Al Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia', *Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2008): 34. Bin Laden engaged in a number of discussions with senior figures in the Saudi regime, offering to help with the South Yemen problem in 1989/1990 as well as the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. For a fuller discussion, see e.g. Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 1 (2012). Wright, *Looming Tower*: 155f., provides a useful general overview.

⁴ Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: Oil, Money, Terrorism and the Secret Saudi World* (Penguin, 2008). 373.

⁵ Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*: 112.

⁶ Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 104f., argues that the 1994 Saudi clamp down on the Islamist movement *al-Sahwa* was the trigger for this strategic change.

⁷ Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*: 115. A point made by Pascal Ménoret, *The Saudi Enigma: A History*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Zed Books Ltd, 2005). 5-9, notes that (p.7) 'What bin Laden is really saying is that Saudi Arabia is in the situation of a colony; that the Americans have robbed the Saudi people of their wealth and their potential for economic development'.

helping Muslims into a person who believed that he would be able to amass and command an army to liberate Kuwait'.⁸

al-Sahwa and the Rise of Violent Dissent

Whilst bin Laden's opinion of the regime was gradually metamorphosing from the cordial to the vituperative, a similar shift was taking place amongst the non-violent Saudi Islamist movement, known as *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* [The Islamic Awakening], who were displaying increasing animosity towards the ruling family.⁹ The origins of this change, like bin Laden's, were in US presence on Saudi soil: as Gwenn Okruhlik points out, 'with the stationing of U.S. troops during and after the Gulf war, Wahhabism was transformed into a Salafi movement that was now explicitly political. The private became public; the spiritual became political... [and] individuals became organised'.¹⁰ The defining moment in non-violent Islamist dissent towards the ruling family came in 1991, when a 'Letter of Demands' [*Khitab al-Matalib*] was sent to King Fahd signed by 400 scholars, judges and academics.¹¹ Another longer and more strident letter called the 'Memorandum of Advice' [*Mudhakirat al-Nasiha*] was sent in 1992, accusing the House of Saud of corruption, nepotism and a failure to implement *shari'a* in the running of the Kingdom.¹² The most important aspect of these letters was not only that they were public displays of dissent but that for the first time, in the words of Roel Meijer, that

the theme of *takfir*, the proclamation of unbelief of one's opponent, was used as a means of de-legitimising the ruling family of Sa'ud. The second theme, which was to become part and parcel of oppositional rhetoric, was the condemnation of the United States as the embodiment of evil, decadence and the spearhead of the Western, Christian 'war on Islam'.¹³

⁸ This was the assessment of Prince Turki, former head of Saudi Intelligence. Wright, *Looming Tower*: 158.

⁹ This is not intended to be a full examination of the non-violent Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia which falls beyond the scope of this study. For more on the Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Harvard University Press, 2011); al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation*; Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*.

¹⁰ Gwenn Okruhlik, 'Making Conversation Possible: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia,' in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Indiana University Press, 2004), 254.

¹¹ A translated copy of the letter is provided by Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*: 180f.

¹² Okruhlik, 'Making Conversation Possible: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia,' 261-62. See also Andrzej Kapiszewski, 'Saudi Arabia Steps Toward Democratization or Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 5-6 (2006).

¹³ Roel Meijer, 'The Cycle of Contention and the Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia,' in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, ed. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2005), 275.

The Saudi ruling family reacted in much the same way as the Egyptian regime did in the face of Islamist dissent and opposition: with repression.¹⁴ In the face of an increasingly popular and oppositional *Sahwa* movement, the regime reiterated its intolerance of public criticism, saying that opposition should be 'confined to giving advice for the sake of God... [if] someone has things to say, then he can always come to those in charge and speak to them in any region in any place'.¹⁵ This overt demarcation of the boundaries of acceptability was enforced by further repression of those in the non-violent Islamist movement who transgressed established limits: for example, those who had signed the 1991 and 1992 letters demanding the 'Islamisation' of the Saudi social and political arena were silenced, arrested or imprisoned (in some cases, all three). Respected clerics such as Salman al-Awda and Safar al-Hawali, who could claim a significant following in *al-Sahwa*, were banned from preaching on a number of occasions before eventually being imprisoned and losing their jobs at King Fahd University.¹⁶

As the political arena became increasingly restrictive and repressive, Saudi Islamists began to leave the Kingdom. Members of the Committee for Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) [*Lajnat al-Difa' 'an al-Huquq al-Shar'iyya*], a self-styled human rights organisation that supported further implementation of *shari'a* through 'democratic' means, relocated their organisation to London where they raised the tempo of their dissent for the Saudi regime and in 1994, another organisation, the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC), was established in London by Khaled al-Fawaz on bin Laden's recommendation.¹⁷ The relocation of prominent Islamist dissidents abroad coincided with further repression in Saudi Arabia. In 1994, those who had signed both letters and still remained in the Kingdom were arrested and the regime reiterated its view that dissent and public criticism were beyond the limits of acceptable behaviour.¹⁸

¹⁴ Indeed, for social movement theorists like Gwenn Okruhlik and Roel Meijer, it was precisely this repressive atmosphere which brought about the narrowing of participatory political space that led to the emergence of violent forms of contention. Okruhlik, 'Making Conversation Possible: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia.'; Meijer, 'The Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia.'; Anouar Boukhars, 'At the Crossroads: Saudi Arabia's Dilemmas', *Journal of Conflict Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁵ Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier Than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Brookings Institution, 2000). 40.

¹⁶ These two were known as the 'sheikhs of Awakening' [*shuyukh al-sahwa*]. There is a full discussion in Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*: 202f. Ménoret, *The Saudi Enigma*: 123f.

¹⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*: 195; Wright, *Looming Tower*: 195.

¹⁸ Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). 175; Meijer, 'The Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia,' 276.

On the one hand, the arrests of the early 1990s effectively brought an end to what Lacroix refers to as 'the golden age' of non-violent Islamist opposition in Saudi Arabia.¹⁹ But on the other, as the non-violent movement failed 'to change the government through vocal opposition by refuting both Al Sa'ud's monopoly on Islam and the ruling family's ensuing claim to legitimacy', so other, now violent, strategies came to the fore.²⁰ On 13 November 1995, a bomb exploded outside the Office of the Program Manager of the Saudi Arabian National Guard killing five Americans, two Indians and injuring a further sixty.²¹ Although different groups laid claim to the attack, their stated logic in communiqués and press statements was identical: violence would continue until American forces left Saudi Arabia.²² The attack was a major blow to the ruling family. Not since 1979, when, in addition to disturbances amongst the Shi'ites in the Eastern Province, Juhayman al-Utaybi, leader of a Messianic sect calling itself *Ahl al-Hadith* [Family of the Hadith], laid siege to the Grand Mosque in Mecca for two weeks, had Saudi Arabia witnessed violent opposition.²³ Nor was the ruling family given long to recover from this affront to their authority: a few months later, on 25 June 1996, a huge car bomb was detonated outside The Khobar Towers, a building which housed US military personnel from the 4404th Airlift Wing, killing 19 American soldiers and wounding more than four hundred people. The car bomb was of a different order of magnitude to the 1995 attack; the blast blew away the entire front of the building and the explosion was loud enough to be heard in Bahrain.²⁴ Once again, the evidence suggests that bin Laden had no part to play in the affair, but in his '*fatwa*' of August 1996, he overtly approved of both attacks on the far enemy.²⁵

¹⁹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*: 193f.

²⁰ Interview with 'Matthew', London, 3rd March 2011.

²¹ Teitelbaum, *Holier Than Thou*: 73. For a discussion of the timing of the attack and the reaction of the *Sahwa*, see Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*: 198f.

²² The identity of the perpetrators remains controversial because three different and previously unknown organisations claimed responsibility for the attacks: *Numur al-Khalij* [The Tigers of the Gulf], *Harakat al-Taghyir al-Islamiyya, al-Janah al-Jihadi fil-Jazeera al-Arabiyya* [Islamic Change Movement, the Jihad Wing in the Arabian Peninsula] and the *Munazzamat Ansar Allah al-Muqatila* [Fighting Organisation of the Supporters of God]. (Teitelbaum, *Holier Than Thou*: 73-76.) As others have pointed out, there is no evidence to suggest that this attack had any direct link with bin Laden, although one of the attackers, Riyadh al-Hajri did say that he had a fax machine and 'received the publications of Mas'ari [another cleric with Islamist leanings] and bin Laden'. See Thomas Hegghammer, 'Jihad, Yes, But Not Revolution: Explaining the Extraversion of Islamist Violence in Saudi Arabia', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009); Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*: 1-2 (on Mas'ari, see 115-45).

²³ On al-Utaybi, see Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, 'Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-Utaybi Revisited', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007); Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*: 133-7; Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (Routledge, 1993). 99-104.

²⁴ Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom* (Arrow, 2010). 178.

²⁵ The 9/11 Report noted that 'the operation was carried out principally, perhaps exclusively, by Saudi Hezbollah, an organization that had received support from the government of Iran. While the evidence

bin Laden's Shifting Strategic Vision

During this period of growing Islamist oppositionalism in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden had been in Sudan trying to consolidate his own strategic vision. It was during the years of 'exile' that bin Laden's contempt for the Saudi regime became even more entrenched and vituperative. In a document entitled 'Declaration 17', for example, released shortly after he had been stripped of his Saudi citizenship in April 1994, he wrote that the regime had departed 'from the requirements of "no god but God" and its necessities, which are the difference between unbelief and faith'.²⁶ This was, in effect, an excommunication of the Saudi ruling family and it signalled an end to the increasingly frosty relationship between the two.²⁷ It also coincided with a shift in his strategic vision: whilst some violent Islamists continued to prefer the traditional *jihad* in which they defended fellow Muslims abroad, bin Laden was, like al-Zawahiri, beginning to favour the socio-revolutionary approach which advocated the overthrow of the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East through insurgency.²⁸

Bin Laden's socio-revolutionary period was short-lived; by the mid-1990s, as the *al-Sahwa* rebellion was crushed, his strategic vision had undergone a further shift – one which dispensed with the 'near' enemy and focused instead on the 'far'.²⁹ The symbiotic relationship between the ruling family and the *ulema* [religious scholars], so his argument ran, provided both with legitimacy and authority and attacking either party would be a public relations disaster which would cripple his emerging violent Islamist movement. As Abu Mus'ab al-Suri wrote:

of Iranian involvement is strong, there are also signs that al-Qaida played some role, as yet unknown'. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*: 60. The author agrees with the analysis of most scholars that in the absence of better evidence, the attack was at the very least supported by the Iranians. See, e.g. Teitelbaum, *Holier Than Thou*: 83 – 97; Thomas Hegghammer, 'Deconstructing the Myth about al-Qa'ida and Khobar,' (2008). An interesting case for al-Qa'ida's responsibility is that of Gareth Porter, 'Khobar Towers Investigated: How a Saudi Deception Protected Osama bin Laden,' 2009. On bin Laden's support for the attacks, see: PBS News, 'Bin Laden's Fatwa Aug. 23, 1996,' (1996). Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges* (Praeger Security International, 2005). 122 tentatively ascribes the attack to bin Laden's organisation.

²⁶ F. Gregory Gause III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). 140. On the stripping of bin Laden's citizenship, see Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (Routledge, 2006). 154.

²⁷ A point made by one interviewee. Interview with Peter, London, 27th March 2012.

²⁸ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; Linschoten and Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created*.

²⁹ To employ the language of Gerges, *The Far Enemy*. It is worth noting that Gerges sees the change in simpler terms: 'unlike his religious nationalist counterparts, bin Laden viewed local regimes, including the house of Saud, as insignificant tools and agents in the hands of the Americans. He considered Saudi Arabia an occupied country and its regime incapable of forcing the Americans out. Therefore, he declared war on the United States, not on Saudi Arabia'. (p.149)

There were two methods to confront the Saudi royal family. Either by confronting the Saudis, thereby necessitating confrontation with the Islamic clerics to unveil their hypocrisy in order to overthrow the Saudis' legitimacy. This is a losing battle in the eyes of the people due to the size and influence of the religious establishment. Or a safer route, which is to attack the American presence [in Saudi Arabia].³⁰

Bin Laden therefore searched for, and found, a different script. This script, which would form the basis of scripts adopted by elements of Saudi Arabia's violent Islamist movement, was essentially composed of three phases: provocation, de-legitimation and mobilisation. The first and second stages were derived from what bin Laden perceived to be other successful operations against the US during which, in the face of difficult choices, they had withdrawn from conflict zones and de-legitimised themselves in the process. In his *Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries*, for example, he writes:

A few days ago, the news agencies communicated a declaration issued by the American secretary of defense, a crusader and an occupier, in which he said he had learned only one lesson from the bombings in Riyadh and Khobar: not to retreat before the cowardly terrorists... Where was this supposed bravery in Beirut, after the attack of 1403 [1983], which turned your 241 Marines into scattered fragments and torn limbs? Where was this bravery in Aden which you fled only twenty-four hours after the two attacks had taken place?

He calculated that, by attacking the US, whom he held responsible for the corruption of Saudi Arabia's political and religious elite, he could similarly coerce the US into considering a withdrawal, as it had in Beirut and Aden. Even if violence failed to bring about the departure of US forces, it would force the regime to make impossible choices about whom to defend: their own citizens or a vital strategic ally. By attacking the US, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri wrote,

... the Saudis will be forced to defend them, which means they will lose their legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims. This will lead the religious establishment to defend [the Americans] which in turn will make them lose their legitimacy. Then the battle will be on clearer grounds in the eyes of the people. Therefore he [bin Laden] was convinced of the necessity of focusing his effort on fighting *Jihad* against America... He then started to call upon those around him to the idea of fighting the war against the 'Head of the Snake',

³⁰ Bergen and Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years', 26-27.

as he would call it, rather than against 'its many tails' (i.e. the authoritarian governments of the Middle East).³¹

In comparison to Egyptian violent Islamist scripts, which were relatively rigid in the government responses they attempted to elicit, bin Laden's vision accounted for several possible scenarios: in the first place, violence was intended to coerce the US to withdraw from the Kingdom; if this did not occur, then violence still would force the Saudi regime to make difficult choices. If the ruling family defended the US in Saudi Arabia, so the logic ran, they would lose legitimacy, particularly if that defence was perceived to be an over-reaction. If they did not protect their allies, the US would be forced to leave the Kingdom and the Saudi regime would have weakened its own position by losing US support, thus allowing al-Qa'ida to foist further demands on a fragile government.

The al-Uyayri and al-Nashiri Networks: Attrition versus Provocation

Despite the fact that the arrival of US troops in the Kingdom in 1990 drove the changes in bin Laden's strategic vision and in Saudi's *al-Sahwa* movement, this did not bring about a parallel change in the broader violent Islamist movement and initially he struggled to persuade other violent Islamists to adopt his strategy.³² Many of the former 'Arab Afghans', the Egyptians in particular, still saw *jihad* as a socio-revolutionary enterprise which had to be directed against the dictatorial regimes of the Arab world, rather than against the expansionist authority of the US. Others, by contrast, saw *jihad* in more insurgent terms as a way of retaking Islamic territories by establishing a front and fighting an occupying enemy; for this element in the violent Islamist movement, other fronts (namely those in Bosnia and Chechnya) were more appropriate recipients of their services.

Much the same was true in Saudi Arabia, where bin Laden's strategic vision was slow to take hold in the embryonic violent Islamist community. Indeed, it was not until June 1998, three years after the fall of the *al-Sahwa* movement, that bin Laden's vision of establishing a new *jihadi* front, predicated both on the 'provocation, de-legitimisation and mobilisation' script and on the principle of attacking the 'far enemy' in Saudi Arabia, began to gather pace. The key figure in driving forward the recruitment push was Yusuf al-Uyayri. Inspired and active in the *al-Sahwa* movement, he had left Saudi in 1991 for the training camps of Afghanistan,

³¹ Ibid.

³² Cordesman and Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*: 114.

attending al-Faruq camp before being appointed as bin Laden's personal bodyguard.³³ Having followed bin Laden to Sudan, he then returned to the Kingdom in late 1993, where he proceeded to forge yet closer links with *al-Sahwa* and, in particular, with Salman al-Awda, one of the 'Sheikhs of Awakening'.³⁴ By 1996, al-Uyayri had become such a prominent figure in the Islamist scene that he was arrested on the mere assumption of involvement in the attack on the Khobar Towers. While he was in prison, the regime began to co-opt Islamist Sheikhs back into the political arena in an effort to mitigate the threat of the *al-Sahwa*; for al-Uyayri, the Sheikhs' decision to cosy up to the regime was little more than a betrayal of Islamist objectives and it signalled an end to his relationship with the non-violent Islamist movement.³⁵

Formulating Scripts

After his release from prison in June 1998, al-Uyayri took on the task, probably on the orders of bin Laden, of recruiting both leaders and lower ranks for the organisation that would become al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula.³⁶ al-Uyayri approached this task in a unique way: he not only explored his links with disaffected Saudi youth who had returned with him from Afghanistan, but also resorted to the internet, frequenting discussion forums and websites, as well as producing propaganda magazines.³⁷ In July 2000, al-Uyayri departed for Afghanistan; the trip, during which he is alleged to have met senior Taleban officials including Mullah Omar, cemented the change in his political vision.³⁸ On his return from Afghanistan his written material began to focus increasingly on the Afghan front and the expansionism of the

³³ Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, 'Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (2004): 373, n.28.

³⁴ It is certain that he met al-Awda whilst raising funds for the Bosnian *jihad* in Dammam; his future father-in-law, Sheikh Sulayman al-Ulwan, was a high profile member of the *al-Sahwa* movement. For further details and biography of al-Uyayri, see Roel Meijer, 'Yusuf al-Uyayri and the Transnationalisation of Saudi Jihadism,' in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi al-Rasheed (Hurst, 2008), 226f.

³⁵ For al-Uyayri's criticism of the *Sahwa* and Safar al-Hawali in particular, see Roel Meijer, 'Yusuf al-Uyayri and the Making of a Revolutionary Salafi Praxis', *Die Welt des Islams* 47, no. 3-4 (2007): 439f. See also Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*: 251f.

³⁶ Roel Meijer, 'Re-Reading al-Qaeda Writings of Yusuf al-Ayiri', *ISIM Review* 18 (2006); Meijer, 'Yusuf al-Uyayri and the Transnationalisation of Saudi Jihadism.' Others have put the date as late as 1999 or 2000, see Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 119-20.

³⁷ al-Uyayri established his al-Qa'ida website, *al-Nida'* just before 9/11 and well before the internet had been widely explored by *jihadi* propagandists. Prior to that he had also contributed regularly to *Sawt al-Qawqaz*, the home page of the Chechen *mujahideen*, as well as the burgeoning Saudi online presence on websites such as *al-Salafyyoon* and *al-Ansar*. See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 122f; Meijer, 'Yusuf al-Uyayri and the Transnationalisation of Saudi Jihadism,' 228f. On al-Uyayri's influence on the propagandists more generally, see Lia and Hegghammer, 'Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings', 358f.

³⁸ See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 120, who suggests that these meetings with high-level Taleban figures is good evidence for bin Laden's role in recommending and organising the trip.

US, rather than on Chechnya, Bosnia or even Saudi Arabia.³⁹ In a book he released in 2003, for example, he rails against the US and Israel which he perceived, in the words of Michael Scott Doran, as 'a global anti-Islamic movement – "Zio-Crusaderism" – that seeks the destruction of true Islam and dominion over the Middle East. Zio-Crusaderism's most effective weapon is democracy, because popular sovereignty separates religion from the state and thereby disembowels Islam'.⁴⁰ As the US began to occupy al-Uyayri's attention so his written material moved towards a broad but heady mix of the local and the global. As Roel Meijer puts it: 'by combining a broad ideology of the clash of civilisations with locally-specific political, economic and cultural issues... Uyairi in his political writings constructed a much more intellectually satisfying and convincing – albeit horrifying – template, that is both relevant to local issues and resonates with the broader theme of global justice, than that of bin Laden'.⁴¹

From mid-2000 onwards, al-Uyayri was recruiting for the Afghan front whilst painstakingly raising funds for the domestic challenge which had been deferred.⁴² The attacks of 9/11, and the subsequent US-led invasion brought things to a head. Even before 'Operation Anaconda' in March 2002, which effectively decimated al-Qa'ida's Arab Afghan presence in Afghanistan, low- and middle-ranking al-Qa'ida members, Saudis in particular, had begun to pressure the leadership to allow them return home to fight the regime.⁴³ The vociferousness of the US invasion finally forced a strategic reappraisal in the leadership who valued Saudi Arabia as a key area for recruitment and fund-raising, but began to acknowledge the need to address their political ambitions in the Kingdom and to maintain pressure on the US after 9/11.⁴⁴ In the end, a sizeable number of Saudi *mujahideen* returned to the Kingdom in early 2002 with bin Laden's personal permission, chief amongst whom was Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri who had played the central role in the attack on the USS Cole.⁴⁵

At this stage, al-Qa'ida's organisational structure on the Peninsula was loosely-connected and nebulous, but rather than reinforcing this network, the arrival of veterans from Afghanistan exacerbated strategic divisions in the movement. al-Uyayri and al-Nashiri neatly represent both sides of this schism. al-Uyayri wanted to pursue the 'provocation, de-legitimisation and

³⁹ A point made by *ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁰ Michael Scott Doran, 'The Saudi Paradox', *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2004): 43.

⁴¹ Meijer, 'Yusuf al-Uyayri and the Transnationalisation of Saudi Jihadism,' 229.

⁴² Interview with 'Matthew' (former British diplomat in Egypt and Saudi Arabia), London, 3rd March 2011.

⁴³ Interview with Peter, London, 27th March 2012. See also Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 162.

⁴⁴ Indeed, so important was Saudi Arabia that there is anecdotal evidence that it was Sayf al-Adl, now Military Commander for al-Qa'ida, who was despatched to the Kingdom. *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 165, estimates that between three hundred and a thousand *mujahideen* returned to Saudi from Afghanistan.

mobilisation' script advocated by bin Laden, but equally recognised that the military resources available were not, in early 2002 at any rate, sufficient for bringing about political ends. He therefore advocated a slow approach of establishing a covert organisation designed to attack US presence in the Gulf.⁴⁶ In effect, this was to follow the 'flight' strand of the survival script; rather like the Military Academy Group, al-Uyayri withdrew into society and proceeded to recruit, gather weapons and train his personnel. For al-Nashiri and others (including al-Zawahiri), however, this was the perfect time to initiate the move to violence because momentum needed to be maintained after 9/11 – not to mention the fact that, according to one interviewee, there were rumours that the regime would order the US to pull its troops out of Saudi Arabia.⁴⁷ al-Nashiri favoured an attritional script broadly based on the socio-revolutionary approach which involved repeated attacks on US and Saudi targets in order to force the US out of the Kingdom. Despite the fact that al-Uyayri and al-Nashiri were working under the broad mantle of al-Qa'ida, the two 'organisations' proceeded to pursue their own scripts regardless of the other. al-Uyayri, while acquiring materiel on a massive scale, began to form his recruits into loose but independent 'clusters' of violent Islamists across the country and in late 2002, he consolidated these into operational cells under the command of a broader umbrella organisation.⁴⁸ al-Nashiri, meanwhile, initiated his campaign across the Arabian Peninsula.

⁴⁶ For further details on al-Qa'ida's organisational structure, see Cordesman and Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*: 113; Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, 'al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Asymmetric Threats and Islamist Extremists,' (Washington: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2005). They describe five discrete cells; the first headed by Turki al-Dandani, the second by Ali Abd al-Rahman al-Faqasi al-Ghamdi, the third by Khaled al-Hajj, the fourth by the future leader, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, and fifth which was never fully established. It is worth noting that these were discrete, semi-autonomous entities without knowledge of the others' existence; indeed, al-Uyayri was so keen on operational secrecy that he was known as *al-Battar* ['the Sabre'] and was not, according to some, identified by US Intelligence until April 2003. See Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11* (Simon and Schuster, 2006). 217-18.

⁴⁷ Interview with 'Matt', Cairo, 8th July 2011. Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine*: 235 describes an interesting exchange between al-Uyayri and one of al-Nashiri's commanders. "Tucked inside the sigint chatter in April of possible upcoming attacks inside the kingdom was evidence of a tense dialogue between al-Ayeri [an alternative spelling of al-Uyayri] and another, less senior operative in the Gulf, Ali Abd al-Rahman al-Faqasi al-Ghamdi, over whether the Saudi al Qaeda operation had enough men, weapons, and organization to truly challenge and overthrow the Saudi regime. Al-Ayeri said no, it was too soon, the organization had not yet matured, while al-Ghamdi strongly recommended pushing forward".

⁴⁸ This organisation would eventually become AQAP: Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 177f; Thomas Hegghammer, 'Islamist violence and regime stability in Saudi Arabia', *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 711f. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 179 also cites evidence from the Interior Ministry that between May 2003 and January 04, they seized '24 tons of explosive material, 300 rocket-propelled, 430 hand grenades, 300 explosive belts and 674 detonators'. As with all figures from the Saudi Interior Ministry, extreme caution is required when approaching them.

Provocation and Attrition in Practice

For Thomas Hegghammer, this two-pronged approach was a deliberate manoeuvre, a two-track strategy formulated by bin Laden and al-Qa'ida's core.⁴⁹ This is probably to ascribe too centralised a command and control structure to al-Qa'ida. Although bin Laden might have had broad oversight – in terms of financing nascent ideas or signing off on the use of violence in particular locations – he was not involved in significant decisions about operational affairs. Indeed, it is precisely because al-Qa'ida pursued what Abu Jandal, bin Laden's former bodyguard, described as a doctrine of 'centralisation of decision and decentralisation of execution' that bin Laden was not party to the minutiae of attacks.⁵⁰ While al-Uyayri had received authorisation for his plan and was probably acting according to orders, al-Nashiri was more autonomous; indeed, in his interrogations in Guantánamo he said that 'he spoke openly with UBL [bin Laden] and, if he thought UBL was wrong, he would tell him so. [He said] if UBL wanted him to participate in an operation, it would be incumbent upon UBL to convince detainee the operation was important to their cause'.⁵¹ The point is that whilst the organisations were acting towards al-Qa'ida's ambitions, they were not acting according to a grand master strategy developed by bin Laden, but to all intents and purposes formulating their scripts autonomously.

In the event, Saudi Arabia witnessed two different strategic stages, one after the other; whilst al-Uyayri followed the survival script, setting his strategic vision in motion by recruiting and establishing independent cells, al-Nashiri pursued his attritional script. The extent of al-Nashiri's plans surprised both Saudi and US intelligence – as Bruce Riedel, a former CIA operative, put it, 'there had long been suspicions of a significant al Qaeda presence, but no one even imagined what was really there'.⁵² In early 2002, al-Nashiri had left Pakistan where he had been devising training programmes with Khaled Sheikh Mohammed and travelled to the Arabian Peninsula, visiting Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE; it was during this trip that he attempted to further his existing plans for an attack on the Straits of Hormuz as well as to crash an aeroplane into US Navy ships in Port Rashid. In addition to planning those attacks, he also masterminded the attack on the M/V Limburg (based on his previous experience in organising the attacks on the USS Cole and USS Sullivans) as well as planning strikes on the US and UK embassies in Sana'a and establishing a cell to carry out attacks on UK submarines in

⁴⁹ A view also propounded by Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 170-3.

⁵⁰ Khalid al-Hammadi, 'The Inside Story of al-Qa'ida,' *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 22nd March 2005.

⁵¹ Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Abd Al Rahim Hussein Mohammed Al Nashiri,' 2011.

⁵² Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future*, 2nd ed. (Brookings Institution, 2010). 107.

the Straits of Gibraltar.⁵³ Inside the Kingdom, he allegedly planned attacks on the Ra's Tanura Petroleum Facility, the Interior and Defence Ministries and the Tabuk air base.⁵⁴ al-Nashiri's expansive but unrealised plans for a campaign of violence on the Arabian Peninsula – so expansive that it is inconceivable that he personally oversaw the intricate planning of each – eventually brought him to the notice of both the Saudis and the US and in October 2002, he was arrested in the UAE.⁵⁵

By the beginning of 2003, al-Uyayri had completed his recruitment drive and had engaged about fifty fully paid-up operational members (in addition to a number of hangers-on), which he intended to organise into five distinct cells in the Kingdom.⁵⁶ After al-Nashiri's capture in the UAE, pressure mounted on al-Uyayri to set his plans in motion but he remained adamant in his conviction that the *jihad* in the Kingdom had to be built up slowly in order to avoid detection by Saudi intelligence; he wanted the time to produce a resilient, organised network capable of launching a momentous attack on Saudi soil.⁵⁷ Once again, however, for bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, attacks on US targets, whether momentous or minute, were strategically sufficient: they would force the US to leave, and bereft of US support, the Saudi regime would falter and fall. Despite his misgivings, al-Uyayri pressed ahead with the campaign. But the network was under-prepared and the decision to escalate premature. Indeed, it is an indication of the network's under-preparedness that at this stage it still had not coalesced under a unified name. The campaign started on 12th May 2003, when several car bombs were detonated outside housing compounds in East Riyadh frequented by westerners, killing 34 and wounding more than 200.⁵⁸ The attack cajoled the Saudi government into a full-blown crackdown and by November, at least a hundred members of al-Uyayri's network had been arrested and 26 had died, including al-Uyayri himself.

⁵³ Interview with John, Cambridge May 2012. Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Abd Al Rahim Hussein Mohammed Al Nashiri.'

⁵⁴ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 167 - 68.

⁵⁵ A number of media reports released on 22 November suggest that he was arrested earlier that month (Philip Shenon, 'Threats And Responses: Terror Network; A Major Suspect In Qaeda Attacks Is In U.S. Custody,' *The New York Times* 22nd November 2002; Oliver Burkeman, 'US captures key al-Qaida suspect,' *The Guardian*, 22nd November 2002; BBC, 'Al-Qaeda Gulf chief' held by US,' (22nd November 2002).). However, it is likely that the waterboarding and interrogation of al-Nashiri led to the identification of and drone strike against Abu Ali al-Harithi on November 3rd 2002 (on which see, Chapter 4). On al-Nashiri's waterboarding see, e.g. Human Rights Watch, 'Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri,' (2012).

⁵⁶ Cordesman and Obaid, 'al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Asymmetric Threats and Islamist Extremists,' 4f.

⁵⁷ Cordesman and Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*: 113f.

⁵⁸ Riedel and Saab, 'Al Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia'; Cordesman and Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*: 113f.

Premature Escalation and the Strategic Gap

The arrival of al-Nashiri in late 2001 brought two contrasting strategic visions to the Saudi theatre. Interestingly, it was not that al-Uyayri and al-Nashiri differed on strategic matters – both recognised the coercive force of terrorism – it was that they differed over the best way of deploying terrorism in order to reach their political goals. In this sense, the disagreement was essentially over their scripts. al-Uyayri wanted to attack the US and provoke the ruling family into one of two choices: an over-reaction which would lead both to their de-legitimisation and, in the long-term, the mobilisation of the general population; or an under-reaction which would anger the US and leave the Saudis weakened politically and militarily. Thus the 2003 attacks on the housing compounds in East Riyadh, which were occupied by westerners, were an attempt to coerce the ‘far enemy’ into pressurising the ‘near enemy’ to make choices about whom to defend – the US or its own people. al-Nashiri, by contrast, was so convinced of the weakness of both the US and the regime that he constructed an attritional script; he planned multiple attacks, seeking to exhaust both oppositions through repeated terrorist violence, reducing their military and financial resources and political will in an attempt to coerce the US to withdraw from the Arabian Peninsula and the regime to concede to al-Qa’ida’s demands.

The second area of disparity was about the ‘phase of strength’ (to return to the language of the Egyptians) and whether it had been reached. al-Uyayri calculated that there was simply too vast a gulf between violent Islamist means and their political ambitions for the latter to be attainable: significant resources would be required to initiate a long-term campaign of terrorist violence against the US and, in so doing, to present the ruling family with difficult choices over their relationship with the Americans. Not surprisingly, bearing this in mind, he adopted a ‘survival’ script which involved discrete, non-violent recruitment in an attempt to cross the threshold from the ‘state of weakness’ to the ‘state of strength’ without drawing the attention of the authorities. From as early as 2000, he had begun to recruit through personal contacts in the Arab Afghan community as well as online where he wrote in forums and released propaganda. al-Nashiri, by contrast, based his vision on a completely different calculation: in his view, 9/11 had irreparably damaged US-Saudi relations, leaving both weak and ripe for coercion and he argued that the campaign needed to be initiated without delay in order to take advantage of the situation.

In practice, however, there was a significant strategic gap between these visions and the way that their strategies unfolded in practice. One of the most important findings of this chapter was that both scripts failed not so much in their implementation as in the assumptions which

underpinned the cause-effect structure of their strategic logic. To put it another way, it was not that attacks were a tactical failure, but that the scripts obscured the fact that Saudi violent Islamist cells were too weak, under-populated and under-resourced to weather the storm of the regime's response. This, as was noted in the previous chapter, is part of the problem with scripts. Because they are stories – in the sense that they describe a chain of events which occur as a consequence of (political) actors playing parts in a certain situations – they are subject, like all narratives, to biases, emphases and outright fabrications. Embedded in bin Laden's script and passed through into both al-Uyayri's and al-Nashiri's scripts was the assertion that even very meagre means can be translated into great political effects if the strategy is right. This assumption was derived, at least in part, from the analogies bin Laden drew with what he perceived to have been strategically successful attacks which forced the US to withdraw from Beirut and Aden. The problem was that when it came to making decisions about whether to implement the script – despite al-Uyayri's warning that resources were insufficient – the script provided unreliable information about the resources required for coercing the opposition with the consequence that both al-Nashiri and al-Uyayri, in particular, escalated prematurely. Their embryonic organisations were not able to withstand Saudi responses and their strategies failed to achieve their long-term and short-term aspirations.

Attrition: al-Muqrin's Script

Whilst the loss of recruits to government reprisals was a major setback for violent Islamism in the Kingdom, the situation was not without its silver lining. In the following months, the violent Islamist movement had time to regroup and restructure under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin who devoted considerable time to creating a formidable media presence, chiefly in the publication of *Muaskar al-Battar* and *Sawt al-Jihad*.⁵⁹ It was a decidedly strategic move: the depth and sophistication of their media campaign was successful in camouflaging the group's lack of operational capability whilst simultaneously encouraging new recruits to join the movement.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency*: 10 refers to an Arabic source which estimates that half of AQAP's effort was devoted to media operations. It is also worth noting that there were – and are – conflicting views on who ran AQAP after the death of al-Uyayri. For some, including Hegghammer, it was Khalid al-Hajj; for others such as Norman Cigar, it was Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin. The latter seems more likely, bearing in mind the former's absence from AQAP literature. See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 203f; Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency*: 11f.

⁶⁰ Hegghammer, 'Terrorist recruitment and radicalization in Saudi Arabia', 41.

Slowly, they began to reorganise around their propaganda output and by November al-Muqrin felt that they had consolidated sufficiently for a further attack. On 8 November 2003, a cell calling itself the 'Truth Brigades' drove a police van, laden with explosives, into the Muhayya residential compound in Riyadh, which housed mainly non-Saudi Arabs, killing 17 and wounding more than 120. The attack was a 'public-relations disaster' for the resurgent organisation: not only were the majority of those killed Muslims (five of them children), but the attack took place during Ramadan.⁶¹ One AQAP ideologue, Luways Atiyat Allah, even concluded that 'the Saudi government was able to turn the attack ... into a media success by claiming that Muslims were killed, thus inciting some against the *mujahidin*'.⁶² As one journalist noted in the aftermath, 'killing Muslims shattered the illusion that somehow the violence, however misguided, was vaguely connected to the idea of pushing reform'.⁶³ This was echoed by an interviewee who simply noted that 'to all intents and purposes, it [the Muhayya attack] broke the organisation beyond repair'.⁶⁴

The failure of the Muhayya attack and the group's dwindling resources brought about another reappraisal in targeting policy and script. In mid-November, the group formally took the name of 'al-Qa'ida on the Arabian Peninsula' in an attempt, presumably, both to provide a discrete entity around which a membership could coalesce and to distance themselves from the Muhayya disaster. As an assertion of identity, 'AQAP' not only carried the legitimising power of al-Qa'ida branding, but also disseminated an alternative strategic vision – one which was directed at Saudi security forces rather than civilians or the US and was thus tailored to AQAP's need to create and maintain public support. In December 2003, AQAP began to enact this alternative strategic vision: on two separate occasions they attempted attacks on senior Interior Ministry officials, as well as leaving a car bomb near the headquarters of the Saudi *Mabahith* [Intelligence Services] which was intercepted by police. Hand-in-hand with the rebrand went a change in targets as the group increasingly turned its attentions towards Saudi security targets. Strategically, the rationale was that the Government's retaliation had all but disabled the group previously and that attacking security targets would reduce the opposition's access to military means and provide the organisation with the room to manoeuvre.

⁶¹ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 204-5.

⁶² Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency*: 49.

⁶³ Neil MacFarquhar, 'Among the Saudis, Attack Has Soured Qaeda Supporters,' *New York Times* 11 November 2003.

⁶⁴ Interview with 'Sarah', (Foreign and Commonwealth Middle East analyst with specialty in the Gulf), 7th March 2011.

Not only did the script not involve the targeting of civilians, but attacks on Saudi security services also remained difficult to justify. Violence against their co-religionists, whether security personnel or not, was simply inconsistent with a key element of their narrative – that they acted in the best interests of Muslims. In order to prevent loss of public support, AQAP created a ‘ghost’ organisation called *al-Haramain* Brigades to take responsibility for attacks against fellow Muslims and to shift the socio-revolutionary element of their strategy on to other parties. For Hegghammer the rationale was clear:

The *Haramain* Brigades was a fictitious entity invented to prevent the QAP from being associated with the ‘dirty work’ of attacking Saudi policemen. This shows that the QAP feared being perceived as socio-revolutionaries, realising no doubt that attacks on Saudis would undermine whatever public support was left for the campaign. The name AQAP had to be reserved for the declared ‘Westerners first’ strategy’.⁶⁵

The theoretical approach employed in this research allows us to take this further. The creation of a fictitious entity was a product of the strategic conundrum which pervades violent Islamists: on the one hand, public sympathy and support is essential for a group’s survival and success; but if one is to coerce the ‘near’ enemy, in particular if one intends to use terrorism to engage in that process of coercion, then it is often necessary to induce physical damage and/or a psychological reaction in precisely those constituencies whose support one needs. AQAP sought to bypass this problem, not very successfully, by creating a front organisation to act on their behalf without any association being drawn between the two.

By 2004, AQAP was rapidly becoming dysfunctional: the organisation seemed incapable of adopting and sticking to a single strategy for achieving its aims, choosing a set of targets appropriate to their strategy, or mobilising substantial support among the Saudi population. Indeed, it was only their new leader, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, who kept the organisation going. Under his leadership, the group renewed hostilities again and on 21 April, a car bomb was detonated outside Police Headquarters in central Riyadh, killing six. Again, the casualties were Muslim and the attack was widely seen to be counter-productive for AQAP. In much the same way as they had in December 2003, AQAP distanced themselves from the violence, and the attack was claimed by the *al-Haramain* Brigades.⁶⁶ AQAP became increasingly dysfunctional as it struggled to come to terms with whom it should target with violence. Further attacks

⁶⁵ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 206.

⁶⁶ Cordesman and Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*: 115.

were conducted against security targets in the Kingdom, as policemen were targeted on five occasions in April 2004.⁶⁷

By the end of April, this targeting policy was dropped and it was westerners in Saudi Arabia who were extensively targeted throughout the summer. On 1 May, AQAP militants burst into the offices of a company in Yanbu, killing five employees of western complexion; later that month, four militants went on a killing spree in a mall in Khobar, targeting random westerners and killing 22 in total. Towards the end of May, a German man was killed as he left a bank and in June, Simon Cumbers was killed and Frank Gardner critically injured while filming a documentary on AQAP. The campaign reached its apex, however, on 12 June 2004 when Paul Johnson, an American contractor for Lockheed Martin, was kidnapped and six days later, beheaded.⁶⁸ Under extreme US pressure to react, the Saudi counter-terrorism effort was precise and uncompromising: the discovery of a number of computers and documents allowed the Saudi authorities to track down al-Muqrin who was killed on 18 June; a month later, the group's headquarters were raided by police and further arrests were carried out. Indeed, so complete was the action against the organisation that, in the eyes of the Saudi intelligence officials, it had run out of steam. This was something of a miscalculation: further assassinations of westerners occurred in August and September, followed by an attack on the US Consulate in Jidda in December, which left six dead; yet another attack was planned for 29 December, targeting the Interior Ministry and the National Guard training area, but the two car bombs blew up before they reached their intended targets. Not long after, AQAP ceased to release its major publications – as the organisation had announced itself as a resurgent threat by publishing *Sawt al-Jihad*, so, for many observers, its death was marked by its absence.⁶⁹

al-Muqrin's Script

The campaign of violence shifted as al-Muqrin tried to find a solution to the persistent problem of how to deploy violence which would mobilise popular support whilst simultaneously pursuing political ends. He recognised that political oppositions seeking to induce sympathy from and recruit within a constituency repeatedly addressed only in the language of violence were likely to lose legitimacy. As al-Muqrin struggled with this

⁶⁷ Respectively, see Brian Whitaker, 'Saudis brandish 'iron fist' against militants who threaten foreigners,' *The Guardian* 5th May 2004; Abdul Hameed Bakier, 'Lessons from al-Qaeda's Attack on the Khobar Compound,' *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 16 (2006).

⁶⁸ See, in order mentioned above, BBC, 'Two BBC men shot in Saudi capital,' (2004); Associated Press, 'Americans Targeted Again In Riyadh,' (8th June 2004); PBS Newshour, 'American Hostage in Saudi Arabia Beheaded by Captors,' (18th June 2004).

⁶⁹ Two further issues were released in April 2005 and January 2007, however these were the work of individuals, both of whom were promptly arrested.

conundrum, the campaign under his leadership shifted on a number of occasions; for the purposes of this analysis, it essentially fell into three stages which neatly demonstrate the struggle with this inherent problem for terrorist strategists. The first stage, in which the local population were targeted, was a near-complete disaster: the attacks on the Muhayya compound left Muslims dead and fomented anger in the population. This failure brought the second stage as AQAP moved to attacking security targets between December 2003 and May 2004. Once again, the targeting doctrine produced a public outcry as the regime argued that those who had been killed were not simply policemen but Muslims and countrymen. AQAP sought to avoid a further stain on their character by deflecting the blame onto a 'front' organisation, the *Haramain* Brigades. The third stage, beginning in May 2004, dispensed with targeting Muslims and proceed to focus violence on westerners in the Kingdom.

Although the targeting doctrine shifted, al-Muqrin was clear about his 'attrition' script. In his text, *A Practical Guide for Guerrilla War*, he describes three phases. The first was 'strategic defence' in which violence was 'fierce and frantic' and deployed from 'mobile bases' in order to 'smash the prestige of the regime and to clarify the picture for the members of the *Ummah* to the effect that the enemy is incapable of stopping military strikes by the *mujahidin*, in other words, to encourage people to oppose the enemy'.⁷⁰ The second phase, 'relative strategic balance', involves establishing 'conventional forces able to extend security and replace the regime in the liberated areas... [which are] able to stand up to the regime's conventional forces. At this point, the *mujahidin*'s power will grow by leaps and bounds'.⁷¹ In the third and 'decisive stage', al-Muqrin envisages 'finishing off' the enemy by attacking 'smaller cities and exploiting in the media their successes and victories in order to raise the morale of the *mujahideen*'.⁷² From this perspective, al-Muqrin envisaged a script of 'attrition' in which terrorist violence would de-legitimise the regime and subsequently 'mobilise' the population; as recruitment grew, the attrition script was to be re-deployed as an insurgency, further increasing recruitment until, in the final stage, sufficient resources had been acquired to 'annihilate' the enemy in a conventional war.

In practice, of course, there was a cavernous 'strategic gap' between the script and the strategy. Indeed, this gap was so wide that al-Muqrin never had the opportunity to enter the second and third phases of his strategic vision. The primary problem was not just that AQAP was unable to survive the inevitable repression (on which al-Muqrin has little to say, other

⁷⁰ Cigar, *Al-Qaida's Doctrine for Insurgency*: 95.

⁷¹ Ibid., 99.

⁷² Ibid., 101.

than noting that the regime would embark on 'fierce, violent, intense, unrelenting campaigns intended to put an end to the power of the *mujahidin*') but that it was unable to de-legitimise the regime or gain the support of local populations under the threat or reality of terrorist violence. In this sense, there was a fundamental flaw in al-Muqrin's script: it was predicated on the assumption that sufficient means were available to weather the storm of regime repression or at least that those resources lost would be replaced by a population rapidly mobilising as they recognised the illegitimacy of the regime. In practice, however, the regime did not respond simply with repression, but with 'softer' counter-extremism strategies and a façade of reform in an effort to lay claim to the legitimacy that AQAP sought to question. It is worthwhile examining these responses in greater detail to examine why al-Muqrin's script was flawed.

Repression and the Search for Legitimacy: Saudi Counter-Terrorism Responses

War means war. It does not mean a boy scout camp. War does not mean softness, but brutality... it is a war against terrorists and aggressors, with whom there can be no compromise. We should stop blaming others. What ails us lies within our own ranks ... If we confront it with hesitancy, thinking of the deviants wishfully as misled young Muslims, and that the solution is to call upon them to return to the path of righteousness, hoping they will come to their senses, then we will lose this war.⁷³

The primary strategy adopted by the Saudi regime, as this quotation from an article by Prince Bandar al-Saud, then Ambassador to the United States, suggests, essentially involved arresting all those with links, however tenuous, with violent Islamism. In 2005, Cordesman and Obaid quoted Prince Turki al-Faisal as stating that Saudi police and intelligence had arrested over 600 individuals and questioned more than 2,000 in its attempt to limit al-Qa'ida's operational capacity in the Kingdom, and this number has doubtless risen in the intervening years: in November 2007, the Saudis arrested 208 individuals who comprised six cells and were planning multiple co-ordinated attacks; this mass arrest was followed by another round of 122 individuals who were recruiting Saudis for Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁴ 2008 saw still further arrests: in the first six months of the year, more than 700 suspects had been arrested and detained on suspicion not only of terrorist activity in the Kingdom, specifically plotting to

⁷³ Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, 'A Diplomat's Call for War,' *Washington Post* 6th June 2004. Also quoted in Boukhars, 'At the Crossroads: Saudi Arabia's Dilemmas'.

⁷⁴ The 2005 figure can be found in Cordesman and Obaid, 'al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Asymmetric Threats and Islamist Extremists,' 122; the other figures are taken from Riedel and Saab, 'Al Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia', 38.

assassinate religious and security figures, but also of involvement in fighting in Iraq.⁷⁵ A Human Rights Watch report released in March 2008 estimated that, even after a number of amnesties, the Saudis still held between 1500 and 2000 detainees on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity.⁷⁶

Hand-in-hand with mass arrests went a shoot-to-kill policy. Between May and November 2003, for example, a number of senior al-Qa'ida leaders in Saudi Arabia were killed in gun fights with the police. Yusuf al-Uyayri was killed after a car chase, Turki al-Dandani was killed when the police laid siege to a safehouse, Ahmed al-Dukhayyil, who was al-Uyayri's right-hand man, was killed after a shootout at a farm and Sultan al-Qahtani was killed during a gunbattle at a hospital in Jizan.⁷⁷ Indeed, of all the members on the 'List of 19', which was released by the Minister of the Interior on the 7 May 2003 and contained the photographs of the most wanted men in Saudi Arabia, five were killed just a few days later in the compound bombings in Riyadh, six were killed in 2003 and a further three in 2004; only two were arrested.⁷⁸ Similarly, at least half of the 'List of 26', which was released in early December 2003, were killed in the 18 months that followed.

Although annihilation in the form of mass arrests and executions can be effective in crushing an Islamist opposition by depriving them of the means they so value, it carries with it a real potential to compromise one's own legitimacy, particularly where those detained are perceived by the general public to be innocent. The regime partially countered this problem by de-legitimising violent Islamists. Essentially, this involved underscoring the disasters which al-Qa'ida created for itself. Newspaper editorials condemned violence, front page spreads showed wounded Arab children and once-violent Islamists appeared on television denouncing al-Qa'ida as predatory recruiters who had deployed deceit and cunning to lure naïve young men into the *jihadi* fold.⁷⁹ This was extremely successful - as Hegghammer

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'Precarious Justice: Arbitrary Detention and Unfair Trials in the Deficient Criminal Justice System of Saudi Arabia,' (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

⁷⁶ There were at least two large-scale amnesties: the first in November 2007 in which around 1500 detainees were released and the second in June 2008, when approximately 180 individuals were released *ibid.*, 6; Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights and Saudi Arabia's Counterterrorism Response: Religious Counseling, Indefinite Detention, and Flawed Trials,' (2009), 4. It is also worth noting that it is impossible to be precise in stating what proportion of those held in detention were violent Islamists because the Saudi regime regularly used counter-terrorism legislation to apprehend non-violent political opposition as well as violent Islamists. See Human Rights Watch, 'Precarious Justice: Arbitrary Detention and Unfair Trials in the Deficient Criminal Justice System of Saudi Arabia,' e.g. p.5.

⁷⁷ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 203.

⁷⁸ Meijer, 'The Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia,' 282.

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that it was the attacks on the Muhayya Housing Compound which brought condemnation from the EIG, in the form of al-Zuhdi, *Istiratijiyat wa taffirat al-Qa'idah: al-akhta' wal-akhtar* [The Strategy and Bombings of al-Qa'ida: Dangers and Mistakes].

suggests, 'the genius of the Saudi information strategy was that it portrayed the militants as revolutionaries, thereby exploiting the taboo of domestic rebellion in Saudi political culture to delegitimise the militants in the population'.⁸⁰ A second element of the targeted counter-propaganda campaign was to institute the al-Sakinnah [Tranquillity] programme in which security officials logged on to radical chatrooms and forums in order to challenge the radical opinions of those present – often referring them to a number of other websites containing *fatawa* reiterating the regime's legitimacy as well as enforcing the proscription of rebellion against the ruler.⁸¹

Whilst the regime reacted to violent Islamism with repression and by de-legitimising its opposition, it simultaneously attempted to secure its own legitimacy. This took two forms. In the first place, it involved acquiescing, at least partially, to demands for reform which would permit 'a pluralistic atmosphere that paves the way... towards the acceptance of the different' such as an independent judiciary, legislative measures to fight corruption, and an end to discrimination against the Shi'ite community.⁸² A critical moment in this was in the creation of a series of National Dialogue sessions in 2002 to be held in June and December 2003 and June 2004. These focused on a range of topics, but for the purposes of this research it was the second session, entitled 'Extremism and Moderation: a Comprehensive View', which was the most important. The outcome of the dialogue was a series of 18 recommendations which were presented to Crown Prince Abdullah. In particular, there were demands for elections of the Consultative Council, separating the legislative and judicial bodies, permitting the institution of trade unions and broadening freedom of expression.⁸³ This position was, at least rhetorically, supported by the regime; in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Prince Turki al-Faisal, then Ambassador to the UK, wrote an article stating that 'reforming the kingdom is not a choice, it is a necessity... we have become more open and keen on reform after the attacks of September 11 while the US has become more closed'.⁸⁴ These reforms did bring about some political freedom: newspapers became more critical of the government (but never of the ruling family), municipal elections were held in 2005 and a National Organisation for Human Rights was approved and established.

⁸⁰ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 219f.

⁸¹ See el-Said, 'De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and Their Impact in Muslim Majority States,' 37f. Also Fink and Hearne, 'Beyond Terrorism', 7.

⁸² Kapiszewski, 'Saudi Arabia Steps Toward Democratization or Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?', 466.

⁸³ A full list is provided by *ibid.*, 467.

⁸⁴ Toby C. Jones, 'Social Contract for Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Report* 228 (2003).

In practice, however, while with one hand the ruling family gave at least the façade of greater participatory political space and instituted reform, they took away political expression with the other.⁸⁵ A closer examination of the reforms suggests that this was not surprising: only 4.8% of the population voted in municipal elections which Mai Yamani describes as ‘partial, heavily managed, and of no consequence’; journalists who transgressed established ‘red lines’ were censored and threatened; and the National Organisation for Human Rights was widely perceived as a paper tiger, unable to deal with the pressing concerns of political detention and freedom of expression.⁸⁶ This extended beyond the suppression of dissenting political voices into the core of the state’s symbiotic and legitimising relationship with the *ulema*. In early 2004, the ruling family dismissed 160 imams and 44 Friday preachers and suspended a further 517 imams and 90 Friday preachers (not to mention 750 muezzins) for ‘incompetence’.⁸⁷ Charitable organisations were also subject to the clampdown: restrictions were placed on donations at mosques and the al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, which had suspected links to militants, was replaced with a Saudi Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad, whose finances were more transparent.⁸⁸

The second way the regime attempted to create an aura of legitimacy for its repression of violent Islamists and non-violent Islamists alike was to establish ‘soft’ counter-extremism measures, designed to rehabilitate ‘misguided’ Muslims and reintegrate them into society. The ‘Counselling Programme’, as it has become known, was launched in the aftermath of the attacks of November 2003.⁸⁹ The origins of the programme lie not only in Saudi social mores, which lay emphasis on the role of the family and the authority of the *ulema*, but in similar strategies adopted in Yemen and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt.⁹⁰ The programme was organised

⁸⁵ Interview with ‘Chris’ (Yemen and Saudi Arabia analyst at US think tank), London 1st November 2010.

⁸⁶ Mai Yamani, ‘The Two Faces of Saudi Arabia’, *Survival* 50, no. 1 (2008): 147.

⁸⁷ Cordesman and Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*: 125.

⁸⁸ U.S. Treasury, ‘Treasury Designates Al Haramain Islamic Foundation,’ (2008).

⁸⁹ The programme’s full title is The Advisory Committee Counselling Program. The precise date is uncertain, but most analysts suggest that it was launched after the November 2003 attacks. E.g. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, ‘Rehabilitating the terrorists?: Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 276; Chris Boucek, ‘Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia,’ in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London: Routledge, 2009), 212; Marisa Porges, ‘The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment’, *Council on Foreign Relations, Expert Brief* (2010).

⁹⁰ As Marisa Porges and Jessica Stern Porges, ‘The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment’. have pointed out, the programme has been refined since its inception, particularly in light of very public acts of recidivism, most notably those Saudis who completed the programme after their return from Guantánamo and then promptly absconded to Yemen to join an emergent AQAP as leaders. One development was to create the ‘Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Advice’, which acts as a halfway house, simultaneously helping offenders re-integrate into Saudi society whilst providing the Security subcommittee with the opportunity for further monitoring and assessment. This

and run by an Advisory Committee divided into a further four subcommittees: Religious Subcommittee, the Psychological and Social Subcommittee, the Security Subcommittee, and the Media Subcommittee.⁹¹ Participants would attend the programme, according to most sources, for six-week long courses catering for up to twenty violent Islamists; at the end of the period, those cleared for release into Saudi society were provided with appropriate employment, housing, funds and, according to some, the opportunity to marry.⁹² By and large, those cleared for release were marginal participants in violent Islamism, 'terrorist sympathizers and support personnel, and at the most, individuals caught with *jihadi* propaganda or who have provided logistical assistance'.⁹³

The Saudis hailed the programme as a resounding achievement; initially, they claimed a 100 per cent success rate on the grounds that no participants had returned to their former ways. The emergence of al-Qa'ida in Yemen videos in January 2009, however, in which two former Guantánamo inmates and participants in the Counselling Programme appeared, put paid to this optimistic assessment.⁹⁴ Boucek cites data from an interview with Prince Mohammed bin Nayif in which he stated that about 3,000 prisoners had participated in the programme of whom 1500 recanted their views and were released; a further 1000 had attended the programme but were still detained; further data suggests that only 35 individuals who had attended the programme had been arrested for 'security-related' offences at a recidivism rate of between one and two per cent. Marisa Porges, like Boucek, notes that the standard figure of success rate is between 80 and 90 per cent and that this includes those detainees who refused to participate in the programme.⁹⁵ It is important to take these figures with a pinch of salt; there is no straightforward metric for assessing the programme nor any easy way of verifying claims made by the regime about the absence of recidivism.⁹⁶

improvement was so popular that further Care and Rehabilitation Centres were established. For a full discussion, see Chris Boucek, 'Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,' *Carnegie Papers* 97 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 17-19.

⁹¹ Boucek, 'Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare,' 11.

⁹² Horgan and Braddock, 'Rehabilitating the terrorists?: Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of deradicalization programs', 278.

⁹³ Boucek, 'Extremist Re-education,' 213.

⁹⁴ See the discussion in Chapter 4.

⁹⁵ Porges, 'The Saudi Deradicalization Experiment'; Jessica Stern and Marisa L. Porges, 'Getting Deradicalization Right,' *Foreign Affairs* 2010; Boucek, 'Extremist Re-education.'; Boucek, 'Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare.'

⁹⁶ Stern and Porges, 'Getting Deradicalization Right.' Nevertheless, the assessment seems wildly optimistic when compared to recidivism rates for crime in general in other countries – in the UK, for example, 90 per cent of those sentenced in 2011-2012 had committed a crime before.

The Search for Legitimacy

The kinetic strategies deployed against AQAP were highly successful – repeatedly and relentlessly removing the resources available to leaders such as al-Uyayri and al-Muqrin and restricting their ability to deploy violence.⁹⁷ The logic was straightforward: the counter-terrorist strategy was ‘targeted, varied and measured’; it sought, simultaneously, to deprive the movement of key personnel by arresting or killing them.⁹⁸ The ‘non-kinetic’ strategies, by contrast, formed a broader pre-emptive script which sought to control AQAP rather than deter or coerce it. Rather than focusing purely on capturing or killing personnel, the regime calculated that violent Islamists had already acquired resources and attempted to disable or reclaim those resources before they could be deployed (or, if de-radicalisation took place in prison, re-deployed). Nevertheless, the general approach was to reduce the human, political and military resources available to al-Qa’ida in order to constrict their ability to deploy violence as a strategy.⁹⁹

In terms of the script, the Saudi regime essentially followed a two-pronged approach for challenging violent Islamists. In the first place, it pursued a standard ‘annihilation’ script which sought to squelch violent Islamist opposition through repression in the form of mass arrest and assassination. Recognising that this risked their legitimacy, the regime also pursued a script of legitimisation involving instituting a programme of liberalisation in order to coat the Saudi political landscape in a veneer of reform as well as implementing ‘soft’ de-radicalisation and counter-propaganda initiatives. Although the Saudi counter-terrorism campaign must receive at least some of the credit for the demise of al-Qa’ida in the Kingdom, at least in terms of removing the means available to violent Islamists, it is important to note that the real success was in garnering legitimacy for themselves and appropriating it from the opposition. In this sense, the regime had to toe – and did with some success – the fine line between instituting reforms and repression: on the one hand, liberalisation of the political system had the potential to dilute its own hold onto power whilst weakening the violent Islamist claim to popular support in the Saudi population; on the other hand, repression was a tried and tested tool for crushing violent Islamist oppositions but carried the risk of losing the regime the legitimacy it enjoyed.

⁹⁷ An argument put forward by, for example, Hegghammer, ‘Islamist Violence’; Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*; Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*; Riedel and Saab, ‘Al Qaeda’s Third Front: Saudi Arabia’.

⁹⁸ Hegghammer, ‘Islamist Violence’, 713.

⁹⁹ Interview with ‘David’, (journalist and al-Qa’ida analyst) email, 5th February 2011.

The need to toe this line resulted in a 'schizophrenic' attitude not only to reform (as Mai Yamani has argued) but to violent Islamists who were repressed on the one hand whilst being confronted with 'softer' counter-extremism and de-radicalisation initiatives on the other. The effect of this 'schizophrenic' approach was to disembowel the core element of al-Muqrin's, al-Uyayri's and bin Laden's strategies: de-legitimisation. All three envisaged terrorist violence initiating repressive reactions on the part of the Saudi ruling family which would lose them further legitimacy and mobilise the Saudi population. In practice, however, the regime reacted not just with repression, but with strategies intended to retain and reclaim their legitimacy in the eyes of the population whilst simultaneously framing terrorist violence in the worst possible terms. In essence, this was a battle not only for tangible resources in the form of personnel and materiel, but for the far more elusive and intangible resource of legitimacy.

Conclusion

This chapter began by outlining two key strategic shifts in bin Laden's strategic vision. The first was triggered by the arrival of US troops in Saudi Arabia and saw bin Laden, like the *al-Sahwa* movement, become increasingly opposed to the House of Saud whom he condemned as hypocrites and apostates. For a short time, he envisaged waging a socio-revolutionary war against the regime; during the Sudan years, however, his strategic vision underwent a second shift as he recognised that the ruling family could lay claim to significant authority as a consequence of their symbiotic and legitimising relationship with the *ulema*. Rather than seeking to attack the regime, bin Laden's strategic vision therefore shifted towards the US, whose presence in the Arabian Peninsula he credited with the corruption of Islamic territory. As bin Laden's strategic vision shifted, so he discarded the attritional script which had been deployed in Afghanistan and adopted a new script, 'provocation and de-legitimisation' in which violence deployed against US forces would coerce them to leave, or failing that, would thrust difficult choices on the Saudi regime and in so doing, de-legitimise them in the eyes of the population.

On returning to the Kingdom from Afghanistan, al-Uyayri began, like bin Laden, to move away from attacking the regime and towards executing terrorist attacks against the US. For al-Uyayri, however, the resources were simply not available to threaten the regime and he adopted a survival script, recruiting and arming in secret. The arrival of al-Nashiri saw a second strategic vision actively pursued in the Kingdom, as he implemented his attrition script with great intensity and breadth against both the 'far' enemy and the 'near' across the

Arabian Peninsula. Following al-Nashiri's capture in 2002, bin Laden and the al-Qa'ida core put significant pressure on al-Uyayri to initiate his campaign which was essentially modelled on bin Laden's own 'provocation and de-legitimisation' script. This he did, only to be killed in police reprisals days after the first attack in the campaign. The leadership was then taken on by al-Muqrin who combined elements of al-Uyayri's and al-Nashiri's script to form a three stage strategic vision: attrition, de-legitimisation and mobilisation.

Amongst these complex shifting patterns of scripts and strategies, one factor remained relatively stable. All these scripts were based on the assumption that means, however meagre, could be translated into political ends, however large, if the formula was correct. There were a number of problems with this, the first of which was, as Saudi violent Islamists found out, that whilst limited resources might be translated into short-term successes, such as forcing difficult decisions onto the regime or gaining publicity, they were often too weak to sustain losses in the inevitable backlash. As has been repeatedly argued in this research, because there is a vast gulf between what is available and what is desired politically, significant resources – financial, military and human – are needed to initiate and *maintain* a campaign of sufficient force to garner the coercive traction required for long-term, ambitious political ends. In practice for AQAP, these resources were simply insufficient to stave off the mass arrests and shoot-outs with security forces, creating a disparity between the way in which strategic visions were intended to work and the way they developed in practice.

The second problem with bin Laden's script and, because they inherited their scripts at least in part from bin Laden, those of al-Uyayri and al-Muqrin, was that the assumption that meagre means could be translated into long-term effects was derived from analogies with other opposition groups who had successfully forced a US withdrawal in Aden, Beirut and Somalia. These analogies were essentially flawed. In the first place, they were based, at least in part, on false stories. As we shall see in the following chapter, the attacks in Aden had not actually produced a US withdrawal: US Marines had been staying in Aden on their way to Somalia and departed from Yemen as planned and on schedule. Second and more importantly, these analogies smothered the considerable differences between violent Islamists in Saudi Arabia and the perpetrators of attacks in Yemen and Lebanon. Hizb'ullah, for example, could lay claim to far greater political support and legitimacy than AQAP, and the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, likely responsible for the attacks on the Gold Mohur and Mövenpick hotels, had an implicit coalition with the Yemeni regime. Once again, these flaws led to a significant disparity between the way that violent Islamists in Saudi Arabia envisaged their strategy unfolding and the way it worked in practice.

The third problem with these scripts was that they relied on the regime responding in certain ways to violence and on other parties reacting in specific ways to these responses. Indeed, their basic structural logic was that violence would produce an over-reaction (or under-reaction) which would, in turn, de-legitimise the regime and mobilise the people. The difficulty was that this cause-effect structure was highly suspect. Whilst the coercive violence of terrorism was able to produce short-term objectives in the form of a reaction, it also allowed the regime to calculate these reactions with care in order to avoid de-legitimation. This is part of the broader problem with scripts: as sequences of events, they invariably imply causality when it is in question or over-simplify the causal relationship between those events. When it comes to making decisions, this has repercussions: strategic visions are often structured on these cause-effect relationships though they are often faulty or absent and, when implemented in practice, intended outcomes – as in Saudi Arabia – fail to be realised.

Chapter 4

Coalitions, Mobilisation and Attrition in the Fragile State: Strategic Scripts and Violent Islamism in Yemen

The previous case study chapters have examined the strategic scripts of violent Islamist groups in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The crux of the problem for violent Islamists in these countries was that even the best resourced group had limited means in comparison to both their oppositions and the degree of political change they desired. The analysis thus far has argued that violent Islamists formulated a range of strategic scripts in an effort to achieve their demands by acquiring further means or maximising the impact of existing resources. As we shall see, this case study suggests that Yemeni violent Islamist groups similarly viewed strategic violence as a solution to the problem of the absence of power; as with the other movements under investigation, Yemeni violent Islamists paid a great deal of attention to the attrition script, perceiving it as the best, if riskiest, way to confront their oppositions. However, they were also prolific in forming cooperative relationships, both alliances and coalitions, as well as in adapting scripts to the peculiarities of a situation or to cope with the unexpected.

Before moving into the analysis, it is worth making a general point about investigating violent Islamism in Yemen, not least because of difficulties in accessing the country and because much of the case study focuses on the contemporary rather than the historical. The violent Islamist movement in Yemen, more so in many ways than Saudi Arabia and Egypt, is convoluted and intricate: it was (and is) characterised by a shifting web of identities and allegiances which often existed only fleetingly. Elements of the movement, such as the violent Islamist 'clusters' operating throughout the 1990s and beyond often rose to notoriety only to recede without a trace. In these 'clusters' it is difficult to identify those outside the leadership structures. Lower level 'members', if they can really be called that, of Yemen's violent Islamist movement often have fleeting allegiances to more than one 'group', and are only partially invested in broader ideologies, interested more in resolving local grievances rather than in instituting broad political change.¹ As Marc Sageman phrased it in his study of al-Qa'ida:

¹ The role of local grievances rather than global ideology in 'Islamist' violence in Yemen is noted by Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel, 'Stereotypes and Political Styles: Islamists and Tribesfolk in Yemen', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 04 (1995).

Experts speak of the success or failure of al Qaeda's strategy, tactics, leadership, membership, recruitment... but these terms apply only to formal organizations with a coherent command and control structure, not to the informal groups of wannabes, copycats, or homegrown initiates who comprise the majority of the social movement. Social movements... are fluid networks that do not have members but participants. These participants to some extent share the vision of the world and a collective identity that permits them to place their operations in the same wider perspective.²

Moreover, accurate information concerning the 'alive, dead or captured' status of key players can be difficult to access and is often available only 'second-hand' through the media. Even the most visible actions of violent Islamist movements – their attacks – can be frustratingly hard to piece together with certainty: information is hard to come by and difficult to verify; 'events', in the words of Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel, 'must be combed for clues'.³

In spite of these issues of what we might term 'information assurance', there is now a growing market of research on violent Islamism in Yemen. This is a relatively recent change in circumstances. Prior to the attempted attack of the now notoriously dubbed 'Underpants Bomber', Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, academic studies, by and large, only mentioned al-Qa'ida's presence in the country in passing.⁴ In the wake of this attempted attack, policy experts and institutions were quick to examine the topic – indeed, there is a whole host of material of AQAP's emergence, its publications and the threat it poses to regional and global security.⁵ Most common of all are analyses of the ways in which AQAP both capitalises on and

² Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*: 31.

³ Dresch and Haykel, 'Stereotypes and Political Styles', 420.

⁴ e.g. Tawil, *Brothers in Arms: Al Qa'ida and the Arab Jihadists*; Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda*: 160; Wright, *Looming Tower*: 319-30 provides a full account of the attack on the USS Cole, but rarely returns to Yemen thereafter. Some academic literature, focusing only tangentially on security issues, was in existence: William Harold Ingrams, *The Yemen: Imams, rulers & revolutions* (London: J. Murray, 1963); J. E. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); G. R. Smith, *The Yemens : the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen*, World bibliographical series (Oxford: Clio, 1984); Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: the Politics of Development 1962-1986*, Westview special studies on the Middle East (London: Boulder, 1987); Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵ Respectively, see Barak Barfi, 'Yemen on the Brink? The Resurgence of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,' *Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper* (New America Foundation, 2010); Mohammed M. Hafez, 'Radicalization in the Persian Gulf: Assessing the potential of Islamist militancy in Saudi Arabia and Yemen', *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 1, no. 1 (2008); Sarah Phillips, *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis* (Routledge, 2011). Sarah Phillips, 'Al-Qaeda and the Struggle for Yemen', *Survival* 53, no. 1 (2011). Michael Page, Lara Challita, and Alistair Harris, 'Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 2 (2011);

contributes to the humanitarian crisis faced by a Yemen edging closer to state failure.⁶ This policy-centric material is timely and valuable, in particular because it alleviates the dearth of reliable sources, but it is also by its very nature short-termist, descriptive and privileges solutions to the 'Yemen problem' over the object of investigation. This, in turn, has meant that the full breadth and intricacies of AQAP's emergence and shifting allegiances with other groups like *Ansar al-Shari'a* – and implications of that relationship – remain, at the time of writing, unclear; the group's adoption of multiple strategies for achieving its political ambitions has not been fully analysed; even less attention has been paid to the development of Yemeni counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies against its violent Islamist opposition, both unilateral and in partnership with Saudi Arabia and the West.

With these concerns – and gaps in the literature – in mind, this chapter returns to the same questions posed at the beginning of the research. It asks which scripts were adopted by Yemeni violent Islamists, how these were intended to work and how these worked in practice. In order to answer these questions, this chapter falls into five parts. The first examines the 'co-operation' script implemented by the violent Islamist 'clusters' that emerged in Yemen with the financial support and ideological blessing of bin Laden between 1990 and 1998. The second part explores the scripts adopted by al-Qa'ida in co-operation with Yemen's underground violent Islamist movement, focusing on the attacks on the USS Cole. The third examines the resurgence of the rejuvenated 'al-Qa'ida in Yemen' movement from 2006 until 2009, focusing in particular on the 'mobilisation' script it envisaged. The fourth part of the chapter examines AQAP from 2009 until the present, exploring the way in which it has adapted and improvised upon a traditional script of 'attrition'. The final section of the chapter examines AQAP's resilience to the broad range of Government strategies deployed against the violent Islamist movement, both those deployed by the Yemeni regime and those that have been executed by international partners.

Alistair Harris, 'Exploiting Grievances: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,' in *Yemen on the Brink*, ed. Chris Boucek and Marina Ottaway (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: 2010).

⁶ See e.g. Chris Boucek, 'Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,' in *Yemen on the Brink*, ed. Chris Boucek and Marina Ottaway (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2010); Ginny Hill, 'Yemen: Fear of Failure,' (Chatham House, 2010); Ginny Hill and Gerd Nonneman, 'Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States: Elite Politics, Street Protests and Regional Diplomacy,' *Chatham House Briefing Paper* (London: Chatham House, 2011).

Yemen's Embryonic Violent Islamist Movement and the 'Co-operation' Script

The 1960s witnessed two major upheavals in the Yemeni political system that were the backdrop against which violent Islamist groups emerged and, before examining these groups in more detail, it is worth sketching out this historical setting very briefly. The first upheaval took place in North Yemen on the 26 September 1962, when a Free Officers movement, financially supported by Egypt, deployed tanks around the residence of Imam Muhammed al-Badr, newly-crowned after the recent death of his father, and shelled it.⁷ Although al-Badr escaped, announcements on the radio declared him dead and proclaimed the foundation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Despite the coup, there remained vociferous local support for the deposed Imam; tensions mounted between the 'royalists' and the 'republicans' and, by 1963, the YAR had descended into a civil war in which Saudi Arabia supported the royalists and Egypt supported the republicans. Although a truce between Saudi Arabia and Egypt was eventually called in 1965, tensions between the royalists and republicans remained in full measure.

The first political upheaval was followed rapidly by the second which took place in South Yemen. In late 1967, a growing Marxist movement, backed again by Egypt, moved 'to burn down the oil refineries' of the 'agent Sultans' and to destroy the 'base of colonialism' in Aden.⁸ As the revolution gathered pace, it first drove out the British and then brought about the fall of the Sultans who went into exile. By 1967, there was virtually no foreign presence left on the southernmost tip of the Arabian Peninsula and with the departure of these forces, Yemen turned in on itself. Socialist and Marxist activists from the South converged on Sana'a to defend the republicans from the growing body of royalists who had encircled the city. In effect, a stalemate ensued and Sana'a was besieged for seventy days: in this period the republican army 'expanded hugely from hundreds to thousands' while the royalists were running short of supplies and in the end, they were forced to retreat to the mountainous regions north of Sana'a, lifting the siege and effectively giving the republicans a victory.⁹

In reality, the 1967 Civil War changed Yemen's political landscape very little. Yemen remained divided between North and South along the colonially-constructed (and long-ignored) Anglo-Ottoman line: Aden became capital of the South and strengthened its ties with the Soviets, Cubans and Chinese whilst working its way on to the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism for

⁷ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*: 87.

⁸ Ibid., 99.

⁹ Ibid., 115.

allowing Palestinian groups to train there.¹⁰ Sana'a was announced as the capital of the North and from here the republicans continued their fight against the royalists. In 1990, a merger was hastily agreed between the northern Yemen Arab Republic and southern People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, but enduring inequalities and tensions between the north and the south continued to pervade Yemeni politics.

'Co-operation' and Yemen's Violent Islamist Clusters

It was against this backdrop of civil war, unification and the enduring inequalities between north and south that discrete identities began to emerge in Yemen's violent Islamist movement. At least part of the driving force behind this was bin Laden who saw Yemen as an ideal theatre into which he could relocate the *jihad*.¹¹ As early as 1989, he had begun to consider the potential advantage to be had in opening a front in South Yemen, broadly replicating the paradigm of the Afghan *jihad*. The similarities between the two were obvious: these were tribal societies on Islamic territory which had been oppressed by a communist regime and there was added appeal in the fact that a growing mass of militants who had proved themselves on the *jihadi* frontline in Afghanistan were now returning to Yemen. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, one of al-Qa'ida's most prolific and prolix strategists, summarised Yemen's prestigious position in bin Laden's vision:

Since the unification, the project of Sheikh Osama became to try *jihad* on the whole of Yemen. The conflict about the Constitution of the Unified Yemen and the differences between Islamists and secularists [on this issue provided] an opportunity to declare *jihad* on Ali Abdullah Saleh and the newly born government of unified Yemen. Sheikh Osama moved to exploit that opportunity.¹²

Yemen's hasty unification of 1990 made her an even more attractive candidate for the *jihad* because, in bin Laden's calculations, it had left the regime weak, riven with internal splits and ripe for the ouster. Abu Walid al-Masri, an Egyptian journalist close to bin Laden, wrote:

He talked frankly about the need to liberate South Yemen from communist rule, the Afghan way. All his moves and preparations were within that framework. To him, the Afghanistan arena was

¹⁰ See Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011). 60f.

¹¹ For a fuller discussion see Bryce Loidolt, 'Managing the Global and Local: The Dual Agendas of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 2 (2011); Bergen and Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years'.

¹² Bergen and Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years', 13.

just one for training or preparing the decisive confrontation on the land of Yemen. He wished to Islamize the cause internationally after the Afghan example, so as to have a massive Muslim presence in Yemen similar to the one in Afghanistan. It is for this purpose that he established the al Qaeda organisation to internationalise *jihad*. He meant specifically the internationalisation of *jihad* in Yemen.¹³

Bin Laden's first move was to seek an alliance with Yemen's most prominent Islamist ideologues – chiefly, Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani and Muqbil al-Wadi'i, both of the newly-formed *Islah* party.¹⁴ He recognised the influence that the two held over the attitudes and actions of broad constituencies within the Yemeni population as well as their ability to incite those constituencies to join the *jihad*. Despite the fact that he made repeated overtures, he failed to make headway because the regime had already co-opted Islamist ideologues into the political arena as part of the GPC-*Islah* coalition.¹⁵ In the strategic calculations of leading non-violent Islamists, increased political power and the opportunity to engage in legitimate political discourse provided a better chance of achieving their ambitions than did bin Laden's global *jihad* and they adamantly rejected his advances.¹⁶ As al-Suri put it, 'he spent a great deal of money on this project but they turned him down because Saleh gave them prestigious jobs and granted them money and power', later recalling that 'we lost a golden opportunity'.¹⁷

With this avenue sealed off, bin Laden's second move was to provide 'seed' money to the violent Islamist 'clusters' which consisted of Yemeni and non-Yemeni *mujahideen* who had

¹³ Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*: 109.

¹⁴ For a biography of Wadi'i, the founder of Salafism in Yemen, see Laurent Bonnefoy, 'Muqbil al-Wadi'i,' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (2009). For an in-depth study, see Bonnefoy, 'Varieties of Islamism in Yemen: The logic of integration under pressure'. Also, Bonnefoy, 'How Transnational is Salafism in Yemen.'; Laurent Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (Hurst 2012). On the *Islah* party more generally see Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics* (Carnegie Endowment, 2010). 136- 59; Janine Clark, 'Islamist Women in Yemen: Informal Nodes of Activism,' in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Dresch and Haykel, 'Stereotypes and Political Styles'; April Longley, 'The High Water Mark of Islamist Politics? The Case of Yemen', *The Middle East Journal* 61, no. 2 (2007); Jillian Schwedler, 'The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity,' in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004); Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*.

¹⁵ Interview with 'Mohsin', (Yemeni politician and senior adviser to the President), London, 9th December 2011.

¹⁶ Muqbil al-Wadi'i would later address bin Laden in uncompromising terms: "'O toi le *mufli*s (le "failli"), je veux dire, Oussama Ben Laden, tu n'es entouré de rien d'autre que de mâcheurs de qât, de fumeurs et de malodorants." [You're bankrupt, yes you, Osama bin Laden; you're surrounded by no one but those who chew *qat*, smoke and stink], cited in François Burgat and Mu'hammad Sbitli, 'Les Salafis au Yémen ou... La Modernisation Malgré Tout', *Chroniques Yéménites*, no. 10 (2002).

¹⁷ Cited in Bergen and Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years', 13-14.

returned from Afghanistan in the mid- and late-1980s and which had started to coalesce in the early 1990s.¹⁸ At this stage, bin Laden's primary objective was to replicate the insurgency from the *jihad* in Afghanistan. As such, his financial input was broadly comparable to investing in a 'start-up' company whose ethos and world-view was akin to that of its financial backers: it was an opportunity to see whether the Afghan strategy was repeatable in other theatres and whether it needed to be expanded upon or adapted.¹⁹ This stage was rather more successful, not least because bin Laden had a personal relationship with key leaders which he could exploit. His plan was also helped by the fact that, unbeknownst to him, these militias were already on the rise thanks to the unofficial backing of the predominantly northern Government who still viewed the southern communists with suspicion and wanted a tool with which they could limit southern involvement in the political arena whilst retaining the façade of deniability.

One particularly high-profile returnee with whom both bin Laden and Ali Abdullah Saleh formed an alliance was Tariq al-Fadhli. His father Nasir bin Abdullah al-Fadhli was a sultan, a tribal leader and the pre-eminent land owner in Abyan Governorate before the Marxist takeover of 1967 pushed him into exile.²⁰ In 1985, after spending much of his life in Saudi Arabia and England, Tariq al-Fadhli left Riyadh for Peshawar before going on to Afghanistan in 1986, where he is said to have met bin Laden.²¹ The unification was the impetus for al-Fadhli's return in the early 1990s, but his welcome in the still largely socialist south was far from warm and, with funds from bin Laden and the unofficial support of the regime, he began to assemble an informal alliance of returnees from the Afghan fronts which the media called *Jama'at al-Jihad* [The Jihad Group] (YIG).²² By 1991, al-Fadhli's militia were actively engaged

¹⁸ Boucek, 'Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,' 12. In 2001, Hussayn al-Arab, the former Minister of the Interior, estimated that by 1993, as many as 29,000 Afghan Arabs had returned to Yemen. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*: 208. The figure seems large, but it is supported elsewhere, see, e.g. Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (Yale University Press, 2010). 161.

¹⁹ On business models and al-Qa'ida, see Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Free Press, 2002).

²⁰ Interview with 'Wilfred' (former British Intelligence Officer, Yemen and the Gulf), London, 2nd December 2010, 19th January 2011, 29th March, 15th April 2012.

²¹ Clark, *Yemen*: 160 suggests that Tariq al-Fadhli spent three months in bin Laden's camp in Jaji, but he has repeatedly denied this, saying that he met bin Laden briefly only in 1989 at the battle of Jalalabad. See Rafid Ali, 'The Jihadis and the Cause of South Yemen: A Profile of Tariq al-Fadhli', *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 35 (2009).

²² In a 2005 interview, Tariq al-Fadhli acknowledged that "Osama bin Laden provided me with funding", but denied that he was part of al-Qa'ida, however, saying, "I have only heard about al-Qaeda recently because there was no such thing when I was in Afghanistan". Cited from Gregory Johnsen, 'The Resiliency of Yemen's Aden-Abyan Islamic Army,' *Global Terrorism Analysis* (The Jamestown Foundation, 2006). I use the name of the group provided by Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*: 187. According to Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*: 209 the group was

in low-level conflict with the Marxists and had opened a camp for the Afghan Arabs in the mountainous area of *Jibal al-Maraqsh*, north of Ja'ar and Zinjibar and to the north-west of Aden.²³

Not that al-Fadhli's was the only Islamist cluster with which Ali Abdullah Saleh formed a coalition in order to confront the South. Under this logic of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', the regime forged temporary partnerships with a variety of violent Islamists in order to wage covert, deniable attacks on members of the Yemeni Socialist Party and southerners more generally. This policy of 'outsourcing' was administered by members of the political and religious elite: Abd al-Majeed al-Zindani, for example, one of Yemen's fieriest and most prominent Islamists, provided legitimacy in the form of vituperative ideological criticism of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a leading general and brother-in-law of Tariq al-Fadhli, is alleged to have provided materiel.²⁴ In that it would exist beyond the Civil War, one of the most significant of these clusters, aside from al-Fadhli's YIG, was the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA) which coalesced around a man called Abu Hassan in 1990 or 1991.²⁵ Abu Hassan was a Yemeni who had gone to Afghanistan to support the *jihad* and while there formed a close relationship with Abu Hamza al-Misri, the London-based cleric of Finsbury Park Mosque, who would play a formative role in the organisation as its semi-official spokesman and 'public relations consultant', releasing statements and ideological support from London.

The period between 1990 and 1993 was a bloody time for Yemen's southern political elite as the AAIA and the YIG, with the help and blessing of leading political figures from the north, began a campaign against them which brought about the execution of more than 150 socialist

known as Harakat al-jihad al-Islami [Islamic Jihad Movement], but I have found no references to this name.

²³ Much of this biography was provided in my interviews with 'Bob' and 'Abu Hadhram'. Clark, *Yemen*: 162. See also Wright, *Looming Tower*: 217. Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, Revised Edition*: 139 suggests that bin Laden also provided militants from Sudan.

²⁴ So vituperative was it that Dresch and Haykel, 'Stereotypes and Political Styles', 409, assert that 'there is little doubt that Zindani ... anathematised the YSP [Yemeni Socialist Party]'. Clark, *Yemen*: 162.

²⁵ Abu Hassan was a *kunya* (a teknonym often used as a *nom de guerre*); his real name was Zayn al-Abdin al-Mihdhar. Brian Whitaker, 'Abu al-Hassan and the Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan' (1999). I refer to Abu Hassan's organisation as AAIA, despite the fact that it did not formally use this name until 1998. This has led most commentators to assume that it was formed in the years after the Civil War in 1996, or 1997 and to over-emphasise the links to al-Qa'ida. In all probability, this was an autonomous group in the beginning whose ideology was similar enough to that of bin Laden to allow co-operation in the future, but it should not be understood as part of bin Laden's global *jihad* per se.

politicians, not to mention numerous attempts on senior YSP leaders and their families.²⁶ Although assassination had been a standard, if sporadic, feature of the political landscape for much of Yemen's modern history, this campaign was of a different order of magnitude and it indicated the extent to which 'clusters' like the YIG and AAIA had grown with political and military support. Indeed, the extent of this growth was amply demonstrated in 1992, when Yemeni violent Islamists conducted their first attack against the 'far enemy', detonating two bombs outside the Mövenpick and the Gold Mohur hotels in Aden. It was a crude and rudimentary attempt at best. The intended targets – US Marines who had been staying at the hotels on their way to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope – had been moved to different hotels the week before and the casualties were limited. Indeed, the only political effect of the attacks was to sour the relationship between the regime and the Islamists and to force the former to take action against the latter in order to keep the US on side.²⁷

'Co-operation': Violent Islamist Alliances and Coalitions

Between 1990 and 1993, the primary script pursued by violent Islamists was 'co-operation'.²⁸ Indeed, all the violent Islamists examined in this period – from bin Laden to al-Fadhli – recognised that, simply put, their problem was that their meagre resources were insufficient to achieve their political ends and sought to address this issue through alliances with one another or, in the case of their links to the regime, coalitions. The strategic logic of co-operation was straightforward: it was a strategy through which means could be increased and goals rendered more attainable. Bin Laden first sought to increase his authority in Yemen by forming alliances with leading Islamist ideologues; as that tack failed, he moved to acquire military, rather than political, support in the shape of former *mujahideen* from the Afghan

²⁶ Fred Halliday, 'The Third Inter-Yemeni War and its Consequences', *Asian Affairs* 26, no. 2 (1995): 132; Dresch and Haykel, 'Stereotypes and Political Styles', 409.

²⁷ Despite his denials of involvement in the incident (which continue to this day; see Clark, *Yemen*: 156f.), Tariq al-Fadhli was widely seen as the leader of the violent Islamist movement and was promptly arrested on the mere suspicion of involvement (although he was released in time for the 1994 Civil War). While it is far from clear whether al-Fadhli played a role in the affair, it is reasonably certain that the attack was at the very least funded by bin Laden. In the months that followed, US intelligence reports concluded along the same lines that "[bin Laden's] group almost certainly played a role" in the attack, although little further information is provided about the actual perpetrators. The quote is from an Intelligence Community paper of April 1993, cited in U. S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Joint Inquiry into the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001 - By the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Volume I* (2005). 194. With regards to the anonymity of the attacks, the exception is Jamal al-Nahdi, a Sana'ani businessman about whom little else seems to be known. See John Burns, 'Yemen Links to bin Laden Gnaw at F.B.I. in Cole Inquiry', *New York Times*, 26th November 2000.

²⁸ It is worth reiterating the point made in Chapter 1 (p.31) that alliances are co-operative relationships between those whose political objectives are broadly similar while coalitions are formed with political actors whose objectives are different. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*; Gamson, 'A Theory of Coalition Formation'.

front. The point is underscored by the al-Qa'ida strategist, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who noted bin Laden's preoccupation both with Yemen and the acquisition of resources:

While the Afghan *jihad* was under way, bin Laden was focusing on recruiting for the *jihad* in the Arab Peninsula, in Yemen. Osama's main passion was the *jihad* in South Yemen. He worked tirelessly to garner the support to stage a *jihad* against the 'infidel' government there.²⁹

Under the informal terms of the alliance, then, bin Laden provided Tariq al-Fadhli and other Islamist 'clusters' with much-needed financial support and himself gained military resources on the ground. In the same vein, Abu Hassan was conscious that his organisation was ideologically thin on the ground and sought to develop his relationship with Abu Hamza, who was by then in the UK, to lend the AAIA a religious credibility wrapped up in an aura of internationalism.

Whilst the alliances were successful in providing violent Islamists with financial resources and/or ideological legitimacy, *coalitions* with the Yemeni regime were more precarious. For Saleh, they enabled him to control militant Islamist groups by providing an outlet for their violence that was beneficial to his broader political aims and he thus welcomed violent Islamists provided that they targeted the socialist south – even going so far as to permit foreign fighters from the Afghan *jihad* to settle in Yemen.³⁰ For violent Islamists, the advantage of coalition was in the freedom to build up resources in personnel and materiel; provided they confined themselves to attacking the southerners, they would be rewarded both financially and with the 'breathing space' to recruit and train new members. For violent Islamists, as we suggested in the theoretical section at the beginning of the research, the strategic logic of coalitions is straightforward: it is a system through which means can be increased and goals rendered more attainable. The problem with coalitions, particularly those involving violent Islamists and governments, is that eventually the need to attend to political goals will outweigh the benefits of co-operation.

Indeed, the attack on US troops in Aden must be seen in precisely these terms – as an attempt, albeit a clumsy one, to pursue greater political ambitions than fighting a mutual enemy on behalf of the regime. That this was the first use of strategic terrorism in Yemen and, bearing in mind bin Laden's strongly suspected support, indicates that this attack was an early

²⁹ Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*: 108-09.

³⁰ Chris Boucek and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Yemen on the Brink* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), 12. Several EIJ members settled in Yemen, see Chapter 2.

manifestation of the strategy which would be adopted by bin Laden's burgeoning violent Islamist movement, particularly, as we have seen, in Saudi Arabia. Two particular characteristics are familiar. In the first place, the attack was against the far enemy – the US – rather than socialists in the South or the regime. In the second, this isolated terrorist incident fits neatly into the 'provocation and de-legitimisation' script which bin Laden advocated in this period. The aim was to sting the regime into making difficult choices over whom to defend: the US or its own population. In the event, the script was based on false premises: in 1992, there was little love lost between the US and the Yemeni regime after the latter had opposed military intervention by non-Arab states and abstained on Security Council resolutions in 1990 and 1991 during the Kuwait crisis; the US, in response, had pulled funding, removed all its aid workers and maintained only a skeleton diplomatic presence. The problem was that the Yemeni regime had nothing to lose politically if its response was underwhelming and American political presence in Yemen was so limited that the US had nothing with which to bargain. The regime's sole response was to arrest Tariq al-Fadhli briefly, only to release him a few months later so that he could resume his attacks on the southern socialists. In the event, it was the regime's half-hearted response, thinly-veiling its own need for violent Islamists to counter the increasingly restless southern elite, which would lead to the growth of the violent Islamist movement during and after the Civil War.

Breaking the Coalition

By the end of 1993, as elections gave considerable power to the *Islah*-GPC coalition and weakened the socialists, the southern leadership 'moved to protect itself', and by 1994, 'there were clear signs... that the south was preparing for secession and the north for war'.³¹ The near-inevitable conflict came on 27 April 1994, and, as it reached its height in May, relationships between states were restructured and new alliances were both formed and broken. At first, the US, still lingering in the Cold War mentality of fighting communism, supported the north in order to counter the communist south. The Saudis, still furious that Sana'a had vacillated over Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and calculating that the threat of a communist south was less concerning than the threat of a united Yemen whose impoverished population could exploit the porous border, provided financial (and, allegedly, military) support to the south.³²

³¹ Halliday, 'The Third Inter-Yemeni War and its Consequences', 132; Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia*: 194.

³² Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia*: 196; Mark Katz, 'U.S.-Yemen Relations and the War on Terror: A Portrait of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Salih', *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 2 (2005).

The US, eager to keep the Saudis on side, recalculated and promptly reneged on their original offers, reducing their material support for Saleh's northern regime. Northern politicians countered by complaining that Saudi financial support of the south was 'filthy money – the same money that once tried to abort the revolution and now tries to abort unity' and instead sought help from the Russians who provided military aid, ironically, to quell the southern uprising that until recently they had supported.³³ In this shifting web of state allegiances, it was the non-state actors – the Islamist militias – that tipped the balance in favour of the north. The 'clusters' which had provided military support to the regime as part of their informal coalition were further reinforced by bin Laden (who, like the US, viewed the communists as an enemy) and were deployed by General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar as an organised and significant force.³⁴ In the event, the southerners' bid for secession was defeated and in the process they lost yet further power in the new, unified Yemen.³⁵

The problem for President Saleh was what to do with the Islamists, who had proved themselves a potent force, after the Civil War. They had demonstrated their penchant for violence, but could not be allowed to attack the south further for fear that they might incite another bid for secession. In the end, Saleh resorted to his traditional strategy and incorporated them into his extensive patronage network. al-Fadhli was brought into the political system, serving as an adviser to the President until his defection to the Southern Secessionist Movement, *al-Hirak*, in 2011; others, like the AAIA, entered into a less formal 'non-aggression pact' with the regime.³⁶ Once again, there were mutual advantages to these coalitions: on the one hand, the regime acquired a certain level of control over violent Islamists who potentially posed a threat to security and unity and on the other, the AIAA and similar clusters could acquire resources without fear of regime reprisals.

Abu Hassan took his time over accruing men and materiel and it was not until the autumn of 1998 that he felt that the AAIA had acquired sufficient resources to raise the stakes and to

³³ Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia*: 195.

³⁴ Interview with 'Mohsin', (Yemeni politician and senior adviser to the President), London, 9th December 2011. See also Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, Revised Edition*: 151. Burns, 'Yemen Links to bin Laden Gnaw at F.B.I. in Cole Inquiry.'

³⁵ So weakened was the YSP that Fred Halliday commented bleakly, 'the space for democratic discussion in the country has been closed; the power of the YSP has been broken, its former leadership is in disarray in exile, and a new, pliant but powerless replacement YSP leadership has been established in Sana'a'. Halliday, 'The Third Inter-Yemeni War and its Consequences', 138-9. See also Schwedler, 'The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity.'

³⁶ Christina Hellmich, 'Fighting Al Qaeda in Yemen? Rethinking the Nature of the Islamist Threat and the Effectiveness of U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 9 (2012): n.42, 632.

break the 'non-aggression pact' with the regime.³⁷ In the intervening period, Abu Hassan had not only persuaded many of the now defunct YIG to join his own organisation, but had carefully cultivated the loose transnational alliance with Abu Hamza and his Supporters of Shari'a, giving the AAIA an international dimension and aura of power.³⁸ Abu Hamza played his part in the AAIA with great conviction from London: he not only acted as a recruiter, sending a number of would-be British militants, including his own son and godson, to Yemen, but also become an unofficial public relations officer releasing vitriolic communiqués from London. The first of these sent a warning to the US to remove its military presence in Yemen and the second talked of US military presence in the port of Aden as a trigger which would cause Muslims to 'explode in the faces of the United Snakes of America' (as Abu Hamza called the US).³⁹ On 23 December 1998, Abu Hamza's statements were shown to be more than blistering rhetoric when the Yemeni police stopped and searched a car, finding a cache of arms and explosives and arrested the occupants who had British and French passports. Five days later, on 28 December, the AAIA retaliated by kidnapping sixteen western tourists in Abyan and demanding, *inter alia*, the release of those arrested on the 23rd.⁴⁰ The Yemeni regime responded by initiating a rescue mission which resulted in the capture of Abu Hassan and seven of his accomplices – a significant blow to the AAIA, which receded into the background for months to come.⁴¹

It is useful to reiterate the major point here. The Yemeni regime was playing a dangerous game: it tried to control militant Islamist groups by providing them with an outlet for their violence that was beneficial to the regime's broader political aims. But for the AAIA, the advantage of coalition was in the freedom to build up their resources in personnel and materiel; provided they confined themselves to attacking the southerners, they realised, there would be both financial rewards and the 'breathing space' to recruit and train new members; as soon as sufficient resources had been acquired they could turn their attention to the longer-term goals of establishing a truly Islamic society. When the AAIA felt they had acquired sufficient resources they broke with the regime. This is the problem with coalitions which involve violent Islamists: not only are their political objectives in direct conflict with those of their patron but they are so deeply committed to these objectives that violence is

³⁷ Boucek and Ottaway, *Yemen on the Brink*, 12.

³⁸ Interview with 'Ken', (Yemen Analyst and Government contractor), London, 13th April 2012.

³⁹ Brian Whitaker, 'Extracts from Supporters of Shari'a Newsletters,' (1999). See also, Jonathan Schanzer, 'Yemen's war on terror', *Orbis* 48, no. 3 (2005).

⁴⁰ Some accounts differ over the date, stating that the kidnapping took place on 27 December; equally, there were reports that suggested that it was his stepson who was caught; however, in interviews Abu Hamza always referred to him as his godson, see Rory Carroll, 'Terrorists or Tourists?', (1999).

⁴¹ Schanzer, 'Yemen's war on terror', 525.

never far away. At some point, the desire to pursue ambitions outweighs the benefits of cooperation and the coalition will disintegrate. But when groups violate the unwritten rules of the patronage system by transgressing what April Longley Alley refers to as 'red lines', retribution is never far away.⁴² In the case of the AAIA, this took the form of an aggressive military response which deprived the group of its leader and left it floundering.

al-Qa'ida and Yemen's Violent Islamist Fringe: Survival and Attrition

After the disintegration of their patron-client relationship with the regime, the AAIA had suffered severe setbacks. Abu Hassan was captured along with key personnel in the attempt to rescue the hostages they had taken in December 1998 and his replacement, Hetam bin Farid, was little more than a *de facto* figurehead who lacked the charisma of Abu Hassan.⁴³ Abu Hamza released new statements from London throughout the summer of 1998 in an effort to regalanise the dwindling movement, stating that 'when you find no ears to listen, then military action is permissible by Islam', but he had little impact in inciting violence.⁴⁴ Bereft of a leader and regime support, the AAIA seemed to have been put down. Indeed, for much of the period between 1998 and 2000, Yemen, with the exception of sporadic attacks on westerners and southerners which had long been a feature of the political landscape, had a brief respite from violence. In reality, however, the AAIA and the broader, ephemeral violent Islamist movement had not been dismantled but, in the face of sturdy Government opposition, had simply pursued the 'flight' strand of the survival script and immersed themselves in the Yemeni non-violent Islamist movement.

Between 1998 and 2000, al-Qa'ida began to gain a foothold on the Arabian Peninsula, not only as we have seen in Saudi Arabia, but in Yemen as well. It is important not to overestimate the structure and size of al-Qa'ida in Yemen in this period, whose strength was limited to a few 'heavyweights', such as Abu Ali al-Harithi and Fahd al-Quso, supported by a small network, whose primary role was in logistics, most likely formed from the last willing remnants of the AAIA.⁴⁵ Ideologically, the 'members' of this network probably identified with elements of al-Qa'ida's philosophy, but essentially the movement was characterised by a transient membership who were predominantly motivated by personal rather than global grievances. As al-Qa'ida in Yemen consolidated in 1999, it began to run relatively minor operations in the

⁴² Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen', 389f.

⁴³ Schanzer, 'Yemen's war on terror', 526-7.

⁴⁴ Brian Whitaker, 'Abu Hamza and the Islamic Army,' (1999).

⁴⁵ Interview with 'Patrick' (senior Oxfam Yemen analyst), London, 27th May 2012 This was a fairly typical characteristic of al-Qa'ida at the time; see the discussion at the beginning of the chapter.

form of attacking oil facilities and diplomatic figures; but the organisation was too inexperienced and too under-resourced to execute a significant attack without the input of AQAP in Saudi Arabia and, specifically, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri. al-Nashiri, with bin Laden's authorisation, was the prime mover behind the most successful and ambitious attack in this period against the USS Cole: it was a well-planned operation, which had been honed after the relative failure of the attack on the USS Sullivans, and if the *modus operandi* itself, involving driving a small boat laden with explosives into the side of the ship as it was refuelling, was brutally simple, the coordination of multiple parties and logistics was complex.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the attacks on the USS Cole and USS Sullivans, not to mention the attacks of 9/11 and the initiation of the Global War on Terror, the US dramatically increased aid and counter-terrorism partnership with Yemen.⁴⁷ By 2002, America was providing training to Yemeni law enforcement agencies and using drones to target high-profile violent Islamists who had had a part to play in the attack on the USS Cole. Indeed, it was in 2002 that the US targeted al-Harithi and five of his followers in the first drone attack which included a US citizen. The death of al-Harithi delivered the loose logistics network a *coup de grâce* and al-Qa'ida's presence in Yemen was, for the time being, ended. As the Saudi front increasingly became the focus for violent Islamists on the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, so Yemen again enjoyed a respite from terrorism.

This period essentially saw two scripts deployed by inter-related yet distinct violent Islamist movements. The first was the 'flight' strand of the survival script. Violent Islamist clusters receded into the broader non-violent movement, emerging when particular operations required assistance or when local concerns became so fraught that violence was deemed a remedy. In practice, the 'flight' script was, as it had been in Egypt, remarkably successful at ensuring a movement's continued survival. The problem for governments faced with a broad social movement rather than a discrete terrorist organisation is that it is extremely difficult to

⁴⁶ The attack was originally claimed by a group calling itself the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (probably identical with the AAIA); almost simultaneously, two other groups, the *Jaish Muhammed* [Muhammed's Army] and the Islamic Deterrence Force, both of whom were previously unknown, also took credit. Aside from the fact they claimed the attacks, however, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these groups was responsible. In an interview with Ahmad Zaidan, al-Jazeera's Bureau Chief in Pakistan, bin Laden admitted that the attack had been centrally planned. Further evidence that the attack was al-Qa'ida rather than the AAIA is in a poem which he read at his son's wedding in Kandahar in early 2001: 'A destroyer: even the brave fear its might / it inspires horror in harbor and in the open sea / she sails into the waves / flanked by arrogance, haughtiness and false power. / To her doom she moves slowly / a dinghy awaits her, riding the waves. (Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know*: 256.)

⁴⁷ See Sheila Carapico, 'No Quick Fix: Foreign Aid and State Performance in Yemen,' in *Rebuilding Devastated economies in the Middle East*, ed. Leonard Binder (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), who notes that 'aid per capita slipped from US\$22 to US\$15 between 1997 and 2000' (p. 197).

eradicate them entirely. American diplomatic cables, for example, refer to the ongoing presence of the AAIA from 2003 until as late as 2009, and demonstrate concern over the role of Abd al-Nabi, the AAIA's leader from 2000 onwards, on a further two occasions.⁴⁸ While a broader violent Islamist movement may be kept at bay, deterred by the onslaught of Government counter-terrorism campaigns, there is always the risk that these will re-emerge in the future, as indeed, Yemen's would in support of al-Qa'ida in 2010.

The other script, which was examined in some detail in the previous chapter, was al-Nashiri's attritional script deployed against the US and designed to wear down their resources and morale in an effort to coerce them to withdraw from the Arabian Peninsula. This, in contrast to 'flight', was far less successful. Rather than coercing the US to withdraw, the attack drew American attention onto Yemen with the consequence that bin Laden began to direct his finances and authority elsewhere, and the few resources that Yemeni violent Islamists did have were targeted and removed by a rejuvenated US-Yemeni counter-terrorism campaign. It was also in this period that the Yemeni regime established a formal de-radicalisation program which dried up the steady flow of those who were released from prison returning to violence. The last vestiges of al-Qa'ida disappeared into the broader violent Islamist movement having 'read the message loud and clear': acts of terrorism in Yemen would receive ruthless responses in the form of drone strikes or long-term imprisonment.⁴⁹ Although Yemeni support of (and innovation in) its counter-terrorism programme was welcomed in Washington, Yemeni prisons held a number of respected militants whose experience in Afghanistan made them a potent force and it was this group that would come together in 2006 to form the backbone of a significant threat to both Yemeni and western security.

From al-Qa'ida in Yemen to The 'Merger' of AQAP: Attrition, Mobilisation and Spin

After three years of relative calm from early 2003 until early 2006, the Yemeni regime felt that their efforts in defeating al-Qa'ida had earned them the right to significant financial and political backing from abroad. By contrast, the international community felt that Yemen had received all the support it deserved bearing in mind its ever-worsening record on human

⁴⁸ Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Sanaa Security Environment Profile Questionnaire - Spring 2009,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2009); Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'ROYG Operation Against Terrorists In Abyan,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2003); Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'August 29, 2003, Security Environment Profile Questionnaire Response,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2003); Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Yemen: 2003 Annual Terrorism Report,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2003).

⁴⁹ Interview with 'Bob' (former British Intelligence official with specialty in the Gulf), Skype, 4th May 2012.

rights and corruption. In late 2005, President Saleh returned from a disastrous trip to the US, during which Condoleezza Rice had told him in no uncertain terms that the US would not view him as a legitimate candidate for the Presidential elections if he did not address the ubiquitous problem of corruption.⁵⁰ She also gave him notice that the World Bank would cut its programme from \$420 million to \$280 million, and a \$20 million grant from the Millennium Challenge Corporation would also be completely axed.⁵¹ Back in Yemen, the analysis amongst members of the regime, perhaps understandably, was that 'without an al-Qa'ida problem, Yemen was just one more poor country in a world of beggars'.⁵²

Escape

It was on 3 February 2006, only weeks after the trip and the day after the decision to cut bilateral aid had been formally announced, that 23 prisoners escaped from a high security facility outside Sana'a, sowing the seeds of a resurgent AQAP. That they dug a tunnel from their cells in the basement of a Political Security Organisation (PSO) office into the ladies' toilets of a neighbouring mosque has been widely interpreted as evidence for high-level collusion – an interpretation that is still denied by the regime – though, bearing in mind the timing of the escape, seems to loom as a distinct possibility.⁵³ The biographies of the escapees, most of whom had lengthy *jihadi* credentials, are revealing. Of chief concern to the US was Jamal al-Badawi, who was seen to be a principal player in the attack on the USS Cole and had previously escaped in April 2003.⁵⁴ In October 2007, he surrendered himself to the Yemeni government but, after pledging not to undertake further violence, was released only a few days later. Saleh rationalised the release to Frances Townsend, Homeland Security Adviser to George Bush, saying that 'Badawi [has] promised to give up terrorism [because] I told him that his actions damaged Yemen and its image... he began to understand'.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ For the corruption figures, see World Bank, 'Republic of Yemen - Poverty reduction strategy paper annual progress report and joint IDA-IMF staff advisory note,' (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2006).

⁵¹ Curt Tarnoff, 'Millennium Challenge Corporation,' *CRS Report for Congress* (Congressional Research Service, 2012), 14. See also, Phillips, *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*: 42 – 44.

⁵² Gregory Johnsen cited in Sarah Phillips, 'Yemen: Developmental Dysfunction and Division in a Crisis State,' *Developmental Leadership Program Research Paper* (2011), 14, n.31.

⁵³ Details of the escape were provided in the researcher's interview with 'Chris' (Yemen and Saudi Arabia analyst at US think tank), London 1st November 2010. The interpretation of collusion is echoed in US diplomatic cables, see Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'al-Qa'ida Escape: Update,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2006).

⁵⁴ al-Badawi's escape – and the anger it provoked in the US – was a dominant theme in the interview with 'Mohsin', (Yemeni politician and senior adviser to the President), London, 9th December 2011.

⁵⁵ Gregory Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2012). 217-8.

The release infuriated the US, who promptly refused to sign a Millennium Challenge Corporation deal which had been recently re-negotiated. In a diplomatic cable, the US Ambassador, Stephen Seche, wrote that

the MCC signing ceremony would be indefinitely postponed because the release of convicted terrorist al-Badawi was so offensive that the U.S. Government was not able to sign a historically symbolic agreement with ROYG [Republic of Yemen Government]...until this situation is resolved and al-Badawi returned to prison... al-Badawi's release might even create obstacles to other avenues of bilateral cooperation.⁵⁶

Despite the status the US attributed to al-Badawi, there were others who, with the benefit of hindsight, presented a greater threat. The most prominent was Nasir al-Wuhayshi, who would become the leader of *Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Ard al-Yemen* [The al-Qa'ida Organisation for Jihad in the Land of Yemen] in late 2006.⁵⁷ He had been bin Laden's personal secretary in Afghanistan before he fled into Iran in 2001 where he was arrested and subsequently extradited to Yemen in 2003.⁵⁸ Another prominent figure was Fawaz al-Rabayi'i, who, only months after his escape, organised suicide attacks in Ma'rib before being killed in a shoot-out in October 2006.⁵⁹ Qasim al-Raymi would also rise to prominence in AQAP as military commander: he had previously been involved in a foiled plot to attack five foreign embassies in Sana'a, and after his escape he organised an attack on western tourists in Ma'arib which killed eight Spaniards.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Embassy Follow-up To MCC Signing Ceremony Postponement,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2007). In November, the Ambassador attempted bargaining rather than intimidation, reiterating to al-Dhabbi the US Government's desire to have al-Badawi handed over into their custody. He went on to 'point to material gains for Yemen as a result of al-Badawi's surrender to US custody', suggesting 'that these measures might include, in the first instance, a rescheduling of the MCC Threshold Program signing'. He even went so far as to suggest that 'the USG would be prepared to work towards the return of Yemeni nationals currently held at Guantanamo'. Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Ambassador Presses Foreign Ministry On Badawi Case,' (Embassy Sanaa (Yemen): Wikileaks, 2007).

⁵⁷ I call this organisation al-Qa'ida in Yemen for ease.

⁵⁸ Barfi, 'Yemen on the Brink? The Resurgence of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.'

⁵⁹ Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen* (Combatting Terrorism Centre, 2011).

⁶⁰ He was one of three brothers all of whom had been heavily involved in violent Islamism. His younger brother, Faris fought in Afghanistan before returning to Yemen; and his elder brother Ali, who trained at the al-Farouq camp in Afghanistan in 2001, was detained in Guantánamo Bay. See Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Ali Yahya al-Raimi,' (2011). Also Barfi, 'Yemen on the Brink? The Resurgence of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.'; Gregory Johnsen, 'Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives Parts I', *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 18 (2008); Gregory Johnsen, 'Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives Parts II', *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 19 (2008). His current status is unknown: he has reportedly been killed in twice, in 2007 and 2010, but videos of him have been released since.

The Saudi Contingent

It did not take long for elements of Yemen's violent Islamist movement that had so rapidly receded a few years earlier to re-emerge and coalesce around the escapees and al-Wuhayshi in particular.⁶¹ In mid-2006, they were still without a formal name or leader, but they began to make minor, if clumsy, attempts against the regime. The primary focus was the oil industry and, by extension, the economic interests of the state through its financial relationship with the West. Although the group consisted almost entirely of Yemenis and local targets occupied their attention, it was the arrival of a number of Saudis that gave the movement greater prestige and alternative strategic visions.⁶² They were part of a larger group of detainees, often referred to as 'Batch 10', who were returned to the Kingdom from Guantánamo Bay in late 2007; they attended the rehabilitation programme for six weeks and were released 'on probation' only for five of them to steal across the border with Yemen.⁶³

Two Saudis are of particular interest. The first was Mohammed al-Awfi.⁶⁴ According to his Guantánamo file, he went to Karachi in 2001 and was then helped by *Jama'at Tablighi* to go to a small village in Afghanistan to work with refugees. On his return to Quetta, he was stopped at a checkpoint on the border, arrested for illegal entry and eventually deported to Guantánamo Bay. After attending the rehabilitation programme in Riyadh, he crossed the border into Yemen and spent approximately fourteen months involved in the now burgeoning al-Qa'ida movement before re-admitting himself to the Counselling Programme.⁶⁵ The second and probably more important figure is Sa'id al-Shihri, another Saudi who left for Afghanistan in November 2001. He arrived in Lahore and went on to Quetta before travelling on to Spin Boldak, a town on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Shortly after arriving, he was injured in a drone strike, which knocked him unconscious; on his release from the Saudi

⁶¹ Some quickly turned themselves into the authorities; others were killed in confrontations with security forces and by July, ten were left unaccounted for. Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'al-Qa'ida Escape: Update.' See also, Johnsen, 'Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives Parts I'; Johnsen, 'Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives Parts II'.

⁶² But despite this, the nascent organisation was also markedly international: of those who escaped, eleven were Yemenis born outside their homeland (mainly in Saudi Arabia) and thirteen of them had been involved in *jihadi* exploits in at least one other country (mainly Afghanistan). These figures are based on biographies compiled by Johnsen, 'Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives Parts I'; Johnsen, 'Tracking Yemen's 23 Escaped Jihadi Operatives Parts II'.

⁶³ Batch 10 was adopted as a slogan by Peter Taylor. See Peter Taylor, 'Yemen al-Qaeda link to Guantanamo,' (2010). Interview with 'Peter', (academic and Middle East analyst with Saudi and Yemen specialty), London, 27th March 2012. Aside from al-Awfi and al-Shihri, the others were Yusuf al-Shihri, Ibrahim al-Asiri and Ra'id al-Harbi.

⁶⁴ His real name, according to his Guantánamo file, was Mohamed Atiq Awayd al-Harbi. Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Mohamed Atiq Awayd al-Harbi,' (2011).

⁶⁵ He was subsequently interviewed by the BBC, see Peter Taylor, 'Generation Jihad,' (BBC 2, 2011). Evan Kohlmann, "'The Eleven': Saudi Guantanamo Veterans Returning to the Fight,' (NEFA Foundation, 2009).

Red Crescent hospital in Quetta, he was transferred to US custody and transported to Guantánamo Bay. He was returned to Saudi Arabia as part of Batch 10 in November 2007 and attended the rehabilitation programme, after which he too slipped across the border to Yemen.⁶⁶

By late 2007 or early 2008, al-Awfi and al-Shihri, accompanied by three other graduates of the rehabilitation programme, had been drawn into a nascent al-Qa'ida in Yemen; these two joined the leadership displaying the status of their incarceration at Guantánamo and the prestige of their part in the Afghan *jihād*. At this stage, al-Qa'ida in Yemen consisted of the leadership council and a military wing called *Kata'ib Jund al-Yemen* [Soldier's Battalion of Yemen] which was itself made up of numerous subdivisions (the most prominent being Khalid bin al-Walid Brigade and the al-Muthni bin al-Harith al-Shibani Brigade).⁶⁷ Despite this, it is important not to overstate the level of structure in the movement. There were, for example, no identifiable mid-level managers, no regional commanders, facilitators, financiers or full-time militants under the command of al-Wuhayshi. In fact, 'al-Qa'ida in Yemen' was, at most, a loosely connected alliance of would-be leaders and eager militants: it had 'participants' rather than full-time members, a flat structure and operated according to the al-Qa'ida principle of 'centralization of decision and decentralization of execution'.⁶⁸

al-Qa'ida in Yemen's Script: Attrition and Mobilisation through Propaganda

The arrival of the Saudi elements coincided with, if not caused, a number of fundamental changes in the nascent organisation. In the immediate aftermath of the prison escape, al-Wuhayshi's al-Qa'ida movement had primarily directed violence against local security targets. But with the influx of Saudis, this rapidly expanded to include centrally-organised attacks overtly against the 'far enemy'; in 2008, tourists were attacked on a number of occasions and diplomatic personnel became a central focus of violence as did the oil industry (seen as a symbol of the West's 'colonial domination of Muslim lands').⁶⁹ Hand in hand with the two sets of targets went two primary strategies of violence: political assassination and terrorism. Political assassination was exclusively deployed against local security targets. In March 2007,

⁶⁶ The biography is compiled from the Guantánamo files; see Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Sa'id Ali Jabir Al Khathim Al Shihri,' (2011).

⁶⁷ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Communiqué #4: Expel the Infidels From the Arabian Peninsula,' (al-Malahim Media, 2008).

⁶⁸ Interview with 'Bob' (former British Intelligence official with specialty in the Gulf), Skype, 4th May 2012.

⁶⁹ The quote is from an interview with 'Tom' (British Intelligence Officer with Yemen specialty), London, 19th December 2010. BBC, 'Yemen bomb kills Spanish tourists,' (2007); Ellen Knickmeyer, 'Attack Against U.S. Embassy In Yemen Blamed on Al-Qaeda,' (2008); Matthew Weaver, 'Britain's deputy ambassador to Yemen survives rocket attack,' *The Guardian*, 6th October 2010.

Ali Mahmoud Qasaylah, the chief criminal investigator in Ma'arib, was assassinated and a few months later in June, five police officers, similarly on patrol in Ma'arib were killed by small arms fire.⁷⁰ Terrorism, by contrast, was retained for attacks on the 'far enemy', for example the September 2006 attempted attacks on oil facilities in the Hadhramout and in more developed operations against the US Embassy in September 2008.⁷¹ In this sense, al-Qa'ida in Yemen broadly pursued a script of attrition against the 'near' enemy in an effort to erode the regime's military and financial resources as well as its political will. Against the 'far' enemy, violence was similarly envisaged in attritional terms: it was designed to cut off the 'lifeblood' of US crusaderism – oil – and to force its departure not only from Yemen but from the wider Middle East. Abu Hummam al-Qahtani, for example, describes the logic of the attrition script, albeit in exaggerated terms :

If the enemy's interests in the Arabian Peninsula were devastated, his access to our petroleum interrupted, and the oil refineries put out of order, this would cause the enemy [the US] to collapse—and they won't merely be forced to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, but would actually face a total collapse. If [our enemy] were to be struck hard in various places, then he would scatter, turn around, and flee forlornly from the land of the Muslims, with his tail between his legs...⁷²

The logic here was straightforward: by attacking the main artery which sustains US interests in the Arabian Peninsula – oil – then the US will be forced to withdraw from Islamic territory.

As al-Qa'ida in Yemen gained *jihadi* experience and grew more ambitious, there was a growing recognition that the organisation also needed to justify violence and disseminate that justification in order to increase political support and aid recruitment. Starting with basic communiqués and statements in late 2007, this soon built up into a formal magazine, *Sada al-Malahim* [Echoes of Battles], which was published roughly every other month from January 2008 onwards. This was spurred on by the arrival of the Saudi contingent and with the escalation of violence went a noticeable increase in al-Qa'ida in Yemen's propaganda output. On the one hand, the primary purpose of this material was to recruit: it was an attempt to disseminate a world-view in the form of stated political objectives and a rationalisation of

⁷⁰ Harris, 'Exploiting Grievances: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,' 3-4. The second incident is reported on the 'National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START),' (Global Terrorism Database 2011).

⁷¹ Data derived from 'National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).'

⁷² al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'An Interview With One of the Most Wanted Men: Abu Hummam al-Qahtani (translated by the NEFA Foundation),' (al-Malahim Media, 2008).

violence to interested parties in Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula and beyond and, in so doing, to attract new members who had broadly comparable philosophies and interests. As Sarah Phillips suggests:

AQAP's narrative displays an awareness that the group's survival depends on its ability to appeal to ordinary Yemenis and to tailor its arguments to the grievances of a Yemeni audience. AQAP has positioned itself as a conductor for entrenched grievances, of which there are many, and which are inextricably linked to the regime's exclusionary approach to the creation and distribution of wealth.⁷³

But *Sada al-Malahim* was more than just a collection of ideological statements concerning political objectives and describing the purpose of violence in an attempt to attract would-be *mujahideen*; it was primarily a tool for mobilising other Islamists in the pursuit of al-Qa'ida in Yemen's objectives. A close reading of *Sada al-Malahim* suggests that there are two processes at play.⁷⁴ The first was to describe al-Qa'ida in Yemen's attrition script, demonstrating the rationale for attacking the oil industry (which provided work for many Yemenis), as well as to justify violence against the tourist trade and diplomatic figures. In effect, then, *Sada al-Malahim* can be seen as a collection of rather standardised stories about the way in which terrorist violence against the 'far' enemy will bring about al-Qa'ida in Yemen's objectives.

These stories, convincing for some though they may be, were likely to be insufficient to galvanise the population in action. The second process, therefore, was to turn these stories from event-based accounts into compelling, persuasive narratives by providing them with what Benford and Snow refer to as frames, which rationalised violence by diagnosing a problem, providing a solution and mobilising supporters.⁷⁵ For al-Qa'ida in Yemen, this essentially took the form of identifying local grievances and situating these grievances in both a local and global narrative that laid responsibility for political challenges, social under-development and economic hardship on both the Yemeni regime and foreign governments

⁷³ Phillips, 'Al-Qaeda and the Struggle for Yemen', 105.

⁷⁴ See also Harris, 'Exploiting Grievances: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.'; Page, Challita, and Harris, 'Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Framing Narratives and Prescriptions'. They describe a reverse process through which grievances are identified and solutions are provided in the form of a 'diagnostic' and a 'prognostic' stage. They argue that this material attempts to remove the psychological barriers to participating in such a high-value, high-risk form of political opposition. In the first eight issues, *Sada al-Malahim* contained a regular feature called *Madrassat Yusuf* [the School of Yusuf] which aimed to provide particular elements of tradecraft to would-be *mujahideen*; these sections outlined how the captured militant could survive their time in prison, how they could deal with questioning and interrogation and how they could cope with the psychological impact. Harris *et al* have noted that the School of Yusuf was 'likely aimed at ... [building] increased confidence among recruits in their ability to confront the potentially deadly consequences of their involvement in jihadi activities'. Ibid., 162.

⁷⁵ Benford and Snow, 'Framing processes and social movements'.

(Saudi Arabia and the US in particular). By far the most common grievance, with which large portions of the Yemeni population were in agreement, concerned the oil sector and the government's naked profiteering from the industry. One *jihadi* author diagnoses the problem as follows:

I think that its [the Yemeni government's] intention is to bring the Muslim to a level in which he would not be able to think about anything other than his daily dish of food ... It has failed in the distribution of the fortunes, especially the oil, although all of the oil or most of it is at the hands of the American master, this band [e.g. the Yemeni regime] has morsels that might provide some of the country's needs, but due to the greed and the avidity of this band for these morsels, there was nothing left for neither the country nor the people.⁷⁶

By constructing scripts and providing these scripts with compelling narratives in the form of frames, *Sada al-Malahim* was more than just the ideological outpourings of another al-Qa'ida front. It was a non-violent strategy for increasing and mobilising resources: it articulated a specific script and cloaked this attritional script in political grievances which spanned large sections of the local population.

The 'Merger' of AQAP

On 23 January 2009, the mobilisation script was taken a stage yet further when it was announced that al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had been re-established under the leadership of Nasir al-Wuhayshi. The video was carefully stage-managed. First to speak was Sa'id al-Shihri, the deputy commander, who began by reiterating 'to our leaders and elders, Sheikh Osama bin Laden and Sheikh Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri – may Allah protect them – that we are still fulfilling our promise and *Jihad*'.⁷⁷ Dressed in black and sitting beside an AK47, one of his dominant themes was the injustice of incarceration – both his own in Guantánamo Bay, and that of his compatriots 'who are zealous for their faith and who now number over 18,000 in prison ... and who are subject to imprisonment and torture by the investigators who are corrupt in both their religion and morality'.⁷⁸ Sitting next to al-Shihri, clothed in brilliant white and second to speak, is the leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi. His near-Apollonian contribution centres on providing religious justification for violence and his strategic vision. Third is Qasim

⁷⁶ With minor editing, from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'The Fragility of the Administration and the Loss of Control,' (al-Malahim Media, 2008).

⁷⁷ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'From Here We Start and in al-Aqsa We Shall Meet,' (al-Malahim Media, 2009).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

al-Raymi, the Military Commander, who delivers a vituperative attack on Israel and the West, going so far as to criticise Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hizbollah, for having the military means to attack Tel Aviv but failing to use them. The fourth and final speaker is Mohammed al-Awfi, the field commander, whose delivery echoes that of al-Shihri; he focuses on the detention centres and rehabilitation initiatives, warning of the use of psychiatrists who 'persuade us to stray from Islam ... using every tool and method'.⁷⁹

The video was constructed to convey one key point: that this was an alliance between the 'Saudi' AQAP and an emergent 'Yemeni' AQAP and, in conveying that point, to present an aura of invincibility – despite the ruthless efforts of Saudi counter-terrorism forces and US interventionism in the Arabian Peninsula, so the narrative runs, AQAP continues to exist.⁸⁰ It was a compelling narrative, woven through with allusion, symbolism and high-blown rhetoric. But in reality, it was a fundamentally fallacious one replete with unalloyed spin. AQAP had been ruthlessly dismembered by Saudi intelligence and the implication that significant figures in AQAP 'mark one' were involved in AQAP 'mark two' simply has no support in the evidence: neither al-Awfi nor al-Shihri had played any part in AQAP's movement in Saudi Arabia – by the time that the movement had reached its apogee, they had already been transferred to Guantánamo Bay.⁸¹ Similarly, any Yemeni links to AQAP 'mark one', like Abu Ali al-Harithi and Jamal al-Badawi, had been destroyed by the Yemeni-US counter-terrorism partnership between 2002 and 2005. And yet despite the evidence, the video has continued to dominate analysis of AQAP and the episode is routinely referred to as the 'merger' despite the fact that there was no organisation with which Yemen's al-Qa'ida movement could merge.⁸²

This, like *Sada al-Malahim*, should not be seen as an exposition of ideology in yet another al-Qa'ida video, but as another tool for mobilising would-be militants. It was an overt statement that a formal al-Qa'ida organization had been established in Yemen with identifiable political ambitions and a clear strategic vision – all of which was wrapped in a legitimising frame of a grievance-based ideology. More broadly, these two mobilisation tools were designed not only to mobilise followers, both in Yemen and abroad, but to channel the behaviour of those

⁷⁹ Ibid. There is a certain irony in this, bearing in mind that, only a few weeks after the release of the video, al-Awfi would recant his views and admit himself into the Saudi Counselling Programme.

⁸⁰ Thomas Hegghammer, 'The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia,' (DTIC Document, 2010).

⁸¹ Thomas Hegghammer, 'Saudi and Yemeni Branches of al-Qaida Unite,' *Jihadica* 2009. See also Gregory Johnsen, 'Al-Qaida In The Arabian Peninsula In Yemen,' *Talk of the Nation* (NPR, 2010).

⁸² Jonathan Masters, 'Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),' (2013); Jonathan Masters, 'Al Qaeda In Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),' (2011); BBC, 'Profile: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,' (2012); al-Jazeera, 'Profile: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,' (2012).

recruits. This was vital for a dispersed, a-hierarchical movement like AQAP which had 'adherents' rather than operatives. Because these adherents would, in all likelihood, act semi-autonomously with little or no communication with the leadership, strategic scripts needed to be identified and communicated carefully to all players if attacks were to be in harmony with the broader aims and priorities of the movement. The ability to communicate these scripts clearly and to define boundaries within which its loose, semi-autonomous membership should act was, as we shall see, one of AQAP's great successes.

'To Inflict a Thousand Tiny Cuts': Attrition and Mobilisation⁸³

Between early 2009 and late 2012, AQAP grew substantially, but essentially retained its preference for 'attrition and mobilisation' through terrorism, although its alliance with *Ansar al-Shari'a* in late 2010 effectively provided it with a semi-autonomous insurgent wing.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the period between 2009 and late 2012 saw AQAP attempt, with some success, to adapt both elements of the script. In order to examine the way in which the scripts were modified, it is necessary to examine these elements in isolation.

Attrition

After the so-called 'merger' of January 2009, AQAP continued to pursue its attritional script by attacking the 'far' enemy on home soil, targeting foreign diplomatic and touristic presence in Yemen. This remained a standard aspect of AQAP's strategy. In March, a teenage suicide bomber posing for a photo with tourists in Shibam, the 'Manhattan of the Desert', blew himself up killing five South Koreans.⁸⁵ Three days later, AQAP attacked a diplomatic convoy carrying South Korean investigators and relatives of the tourists killed previously to the airport, but no casualties were sustained.⁸⁶ On 26 April 2010, a suicide bomber wearing the khaki brown clothes of Yemeni high school children, blew himself up as the British ambassador was driving

⁸³ The phrase is from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Inspire 3,' (al-Malahim Media, 2010).

⁸⁴ At the beginning of 2009, it was estimated that AQAP consisted of approximately two or three hundred members (Gregory Johnsen, 'Frontline: al-Qaeda in Yemen,' (2012).). By 2012, John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism estimated there were more than 1000 members (Tim Lister, 'Killing of al Qaeda leader in Yemen evidence of new U.S.-Yemeni offensive,' (2012).)

⁸⁵ Koehler-Derrick, *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*: 47f; BBC, 'Tourists die in Yemen explosion,' (2009). Shibam is a small town in the Hadhramout replete with mud-brick tower blocks which rise out of the cliffs and which date back to the 16th Century; it is, according to UNESCO, one of the 'oldest and best examples of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction'. UNESCO, 'Old Walled City of Shibam,' (n.d.).

⁸⁶ Agence France Presse, 'Bomber targets S Koreans in Yemen,' (2009). For a full discussion, see James Spencer, 'Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula: MOs & Deductions', *Small Wars Journal* (2011).

past, wounding three.⁸⁷ Six months later, a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at the British deputy ambassador. In December 2010, while four US embassy staff were eating at a popular restaurant, their car was blown up outside. AQAP also continued its now relatively long-standing campaign of terrorism against local targets. The oil industry remained attractive for AQAP because these attacks could be couched in the language of local grievances, southern secessionism and had the potential to appeal to different constituencies outside the traditional Islamist core.

By August 2009, however, the attrition script had been reformulated to include the more ambitious element of attacking the far enemy abroad. At this stage, the preoccupation was not so much with the West but with Saudi Arabia. In the tenth edition of *Sada al-Malahim*, the author of one article asserts that 'the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh is on the verge of collapsing and fleeing from Yemen... our impending battle is with the Saudi regime, which opened the Arabian Peninsula for the Americans, making it a base from which the Christian legions launched to demolish our Muslim brothers in Iraq and Afghanistan'.⁸⁸ That AQAP began to see the Saudi, rather than the Yemeni, regime as their primary target became abundantly clear for a few months towards the end of 2009. Abdullah al-Asiri, who had left Saudi Arabia for Yemen in late 2007, made contact with Saudi intelligence in July, saying that he wanted to turn himself in to the rehabilitation programme. The deputy Minister of the Interior, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef welcomed the opportunity and al-Asiri was invited to Jiddah. On entering the Prince's compound, he asked that the standard search be waived as a demonstration of good faith.⁸⁹ The Prince honoured the request, in turn asking him to verify his status as a member of AQAP by introducing him to another potential AQAP defector via telephone. al-Asiri then called his contact, and after a few moments of conversation, al-Asiri passed the phone on to the Prince before promptly detonating the explosives that had been sewn in to his underwear.⁹⁰ Despite the fact that the ploy worked, his body limited the extent

⁸⁷ Interview with 'Frank' (British Intelligence Officer with Yemen specialty), London, 26th July 2012.

⁸⁸ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Masha'l al-Shadukhi: Limadha Nuqatil fi Jazirat al-'Arab?', *Sada al-Malahim* 10 (2009). Cited in Loidolt, 'Managing the Global and Local: The Dual Agendas of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula', 108.

⁸⁹ Interview with 'Frank' (British Intelligence Officer with Yemen specialty), London, 26th July 2012.

⁹⁰ The conversation was recorded by al-Asiri's opposite number and released as part of an audio recording in al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'The Descendants of Muhammad bin Maslamah,' ed. Sada al-Malahim (Translated by NEFA Foundation 2009). Full details of the attack were obtained in an interview with 'Frank' (British Intelligence Officer with Yemen specialty), London, 26th July 2012, who was absolutely clear about the positioning of the explosives on which there are multiple stories concerning the attack on Mohammed bin Nayef; some are unclear as to where the explosives were e.g. Koehler-Derrick, *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*: 48-49. Others suggest that the explosives were inserted into the rectum. See, primarily, Gregory Johnsen, 'Borderlands,' (2009); Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*. Chris McGreal and Vikram Dodd, 'Cargo bombs plot: US hunts Saudi extremist,' *The Guardian*, 31 October 2010; Chris McGreal, 'Ibrahim Hassan al-Asiri: the

and direction of the blast and bin Nayef survived with relatively minor wounds.⁹¹ In October, three men were stopped at a Saudi checkpoint on the border with Yemen. Two of the three men were dressed as women and, as a female guard went up to check their papers, they opened fire.⁹² A brief firefight ensued in which the two passengers – Ra'id al-Harbi and Yusuf al-Shihri, another member of Batch 10 and brother-in-law of Sa'id al-Shihri – were killed.⁹³ When the car was searched, a number of light weapons were found, as well as two ready-made suicide vests and the materials to make at least another two. Although the Saudi regime had attracted some of AQAP's ire since early 2008, neatly coinciding with the arrival of the Saudi faction, it was after the 'merger' that this view became increasingly entrenched. At this stage, as one report puts it, 'calls to attack the Saudi royal family and overthrow the Kingdom's government were easily the most common objective articulated by [the] four prominent Saudi members of AQAP'.⁹⁴

December 2009, however, saw another slight adjustment to the script which dispensed with targeted killings of the Saudi political elite in exchange for indiscriminate attacks on western civilians abroad. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab arrived in Yemen in the spring of 2009. He had studied engineering at University College London and graduated in 2008, before briefly going on to Dubai to study management. Although Abdulmutallab had had strong views before his departure for Dubai, they seem to have become increasingly entrenched while he was there and after a few months, he dropped out of the course and went on to Yemen to study Arabic in Sana'a. It was here that he connected with members of AQAP, having written to al-Awlaqi and 'explaining why he wanted to join the *jihad*'; by November 2009, he was in a safehouse in Shabwa being briefed on his forthcoming operation.⁹⁵ A month later, he travelled to Nigeria,

Prime Bombmaking Suspect,' 31st October 2010. Chris McGreal and Vikram Dodd, 'Cargo plane bomb plot: Saudi double agent 'gave crucial alert'', *The Guardian*, 1st November 2010.

⁹¹ The author has seen photographs of the scene and analysis of the blast which was directed to the sides of al-Asiri rather than forward. As further information came to light in the aftermath of the attack, it emerged that Abdullah was the younger brother of Ibrahim al-Asiri, AQAP's notorious if elusive bomb-maker who had himself been arrested at some point in the 2000s for trying to enter Iraq. In *Sada al-Malahim* he said that prison was a foundational experience which made him 'see the depths of [Saudi] servitude to the Crusaders and their hatred for the true worshippers of God, from the way they interrogated me'; like so many others, particularly Saudis, who joined AQAP in late 2007 and beyond, arrest and imprisonment seem to have driven them towards the cause rather than away from it.

⁹² Gregory Johnsen, 'AQAP in Yemen and the Christmas Day Terrorist Attack,' *CTC Sentinel* (Combatting Terrorism Centre at West Point, 2010). A previous and similar shoot out, without the disguises took place in late September 2009, see Thomas Joscelyn, 'Former Gitmo detainee killed in shootout,' (2009).

⁹³ For a fuller biography of Yusuf al-Shihri, see Thomas Joscelyn, 'Another former Gitmo detainee killed in shootout,' (2009). Also, Kohlmann, "'The Eleven": Saudi Guantanamo Veterans Returning to the Fight,' 7-10.

⁹⁴ Koehler-Derrick, *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*: 49.

⁹⁵ Interview with 'Chris' (Yemen and Saudi Arabia analyst at US think tank), London 1st November 2010. See also: Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*: 257. See also Koehler-Derrick, *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*: 52.

stopping off in Ethiopia *en route*. He then flew from Lagos to Amsterdam, where he boarded his next flight, Northwest Airlines 253 to Detroit.⁹⁶ During the flight, he attempted to set light to a primitive fuse, and in so doing was spotted by passengers who restrained him. Similarly, in October 2010 following a tip off from Saudi intelligence, two printer cartridges containing PETN, by now AQAP's explosive of choice, were found on cargo planes in England and in Dubai; the cartridges had been stashed in packages sent from Yemen to Jewish organisations in Chicago, but were designed to explode in mid-flight. That these devices resembled that of Abdulmutallab, and had been coordinated in terms of addresses, delivery and timed explosion are all indicative of a centralised plot, planned, sanctioned, funded and executed by core members of AQAP.⁹⁷

Although the influx of Saudis had a part to play in the internationalisation of AQAP's attrition script, directing it in particular against the Saudi regime, there were others that came to the group which made it genuinely global. Most famous amongst these was Anwar al-Awlaqi, the now notorious Yemeni ideologue who had US citizenship. al-Awlaqi rose through the ranks of AQAP relatively quickly. After leaving the US in 2002 and moving to the UK where he spent two years as an itinerant lecturer, he returned to Yemen in 2004 and took up a position at Iman University, the intellectual stronghold of Abd al-Majid al-Zindani; in August 2006, he was arrested for the kidnap of a Shi'ite teenager and a plot to kidnap a US diplomatic official, only to be released in 2008. Like ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb, Omar Abd al-Rahman and Yusuf al-Uyayri, his prison experience seems to have driven him closer to al-Qa'ida's philosophy and by the time of the 'merger', he had become fully committed to that philosophy. Although he had no military expertise or experience of the Afghan *jihad*, within a matter of a year or so, he had acquired a reputation in the US as the most dangerous member of AQAP, even over the elusive Ibrahim al-Asiri and the leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi.

⁹⁶ His travel route is derived from that provided by BBC, 'Profile: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab,' (2011).

⁹⁷ Shiraz Maher, 'Instant Analysis: New Issue of Inspire Magazine,' (2010). The fact that one of the packages contained a copy of *Great Expectations* has caused much ink to be spilled over the role of al-Awlaqi in this last attack. For some it is evidence for his central role, citing an interview with *Inspire* magazine in which he said that it had been his favourite book when he was in prison. This does not, however, sit easily with al-Awlaqi's role in AQAP as it has been described above. More likely is that the book appealed to core members of AQAP like al-Wuhayshi precisely because it brought al-Awlaqi, now viewed by the US as an arch enemy, to mind. It also goes without saying that the book's title had a symbolism which appealed to AQAP: this was an attack which broke the mould by focusing on cargo rather than passenger planes and by cutting out the suicide bomber and the networks of communication and security that presented ample opportunity for interception. By contrast, this involved little financial input, little in the way of personnel and materiel and yet could provide substantial coercive force.

The perception in the US that al-Awlaqi was a genuine threat to homeland security was largely predicated on his earlier history: while he was an Imam in California in the 1990s he had links to Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, both of whom turned out to be 9/11 hijackers; a very few sources suggest that he attended a training camp in Afghanistan or Pakistan, but, aside from these sources, there is no further evidence to suggest this is the case.⁹⁸ Others have pointed out that al-Awlaqi was connected through his vice-presidency of a Yemeni organisation, the Charitable Society for Social Welfare, to a low-level facilitator who paid for bin Laden's satellite phone.⁹⁹ There is a further claim that 'in January 2000, an Egyptian member of [Omar Abdul] Rahman's Islamic Group visited Awlaki's mosque, where he met with the young preacher'; this seems rather difficult to believe bearing in mind that Rahman had been in prison since 1992 and his organisation effectively disbanded since 1997.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, all the publicly available evidence suggests that, despite his relationships with violent Islamists, throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, al-Awlaqi was nothing more than a law-abiding Islamist functioning as a fairly typical participant in the (extremist parts) of the Islamist movement.

If al-Awlaqi's early position in the broad spectrum of Islamism is a topic for mild debate, then his role in AQAP from the merger onwards is a source of deep contestation. For some, he was the 'Head of Foreign Operations', tasked with running a small cell structurally adjacent to the organisation, with a portfolio that comprised attacking the far enemy beyond Yemen; in the view of these analysts, the cell consisted of about ten individuals, including an expert bomb-maker like Ibrahim al-Asiri.¹⁰¹ For other analysts, however, he was little more than an ideologue divorced from the operational side – a source of concern for his ability to appeal to

⁹⁸ Although there is evidence he went to Afghanistan, it was in 1993, see Bobby Ghosh, 'How Dangerous Is the Cleric Anwar al-Awlaki?', *Time*, 13th January 2010. On the hijackers, see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*: 215f. It will be noticed that Khaled al-Mihdhar shares the same name as Abu Hassan (also known as Zayn al-Abdin al-Mihdhar); both were involved in the AAIA, the latter as a leader. There is no evidence to suggest that they were related, or indeed, that they were not related.

⁹⁹ Media articles have also pointed out that al-Zindani, the fiery Islamist ideologue and associate of al-Awlaqi, also played a role in the charity. See J. M. Berger, 'Exclusive: U.S. Gave Millions To Charity Linked To Al Qaeda, Anwar Awlaki,' (2010).

¹⁰⁰ J. M. Berger, 'Anwar Al-Awlaki's Links to the September 11 Hijackers,' *The Atlantic*, 9th September 2011.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Hegghammer, 'The Case for Chasing al-Awlaki,' *Foreign Policy* (2010); Frank Ciluffo and Clinton Watts, 'Yemen & Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Exploiting a Window of Counterterrorism Opportunity,' *HSPI Issue Brief Series* (Homeland Security and Policy Institute, 2011), are the main exponents; Frank Ciluffo and Clinton Watts, 'Countering the threat posed by AQAP: Embrace, don't chase Yemen's chaos,' (2011). See also Chris Boucek, 'The New Face of al-Qaeda?', *Foreign Policy*, 18th May 2011; 'M.J.S.', 'The Killing of al-Awlaki: A Crippling Blow,' (2011); Hakim Almasmari, Margaret Coker, and Siobhan Gorman, 'Drone Kills Top Al Qaeda Figure,' *Wall Street Journal*, 1st October 2011; Adrian Blomfield, 'Analysis: Awlaki's death is a boost for the West,' (2011).

self-starters and hangers-on in the West and to incite them to grassroots *jihad* abroad.¹⁰² Very rarely, he is viewed as a peripheral figure whose appeal and charisma was limited to English speaking audiences. Evidence for al-Awlaqi's 'Head of Foreign Operations' role is, like that concerning his role in the violent Islamist movement in the US, extremely thin. Hegghammer, one of the key proponents, suggests that

in the latest issue of the group's English-language magazine *Inspire*, an article signed "Head of Foreign Operations" takes credit for the recent parcel bomb plot and outlines in great detail the planning and thinking behind it. The article is almost certainly written by Awlaki. We know this because the article references obscure figures from the history of Muslim Spain, a pet subject of Awlaki's, and because it mentions Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, a book he reviewed on his blog in 2008.¹⁰³

Normally an insightful and dedicated analyst, Hegghammer leaves more questions unanswered than answered: for example, why did al-Awlaqi, who had been far from coy about identifying himself in videos and publications before, not simply sign off with his own name and why was he promoted so rapidly into such a decidedly operational role?¹⁰⁴ On examination, there is little evidence to suggest that al-Awlaqi had the operational experience or skill required to run centrally-planned and -funded operations abroad. Indeed, when Nasir al-Wuhayshi wrote to bin Laden asking that al-Awlaqi be instated as leader of AQAP in his stead, bin Laden's response indicates that he had severe reservations because of al-Awlaqi's lack of military experience:

inform him [Nasir al-Wuhayshi], on my behalf in a private message to him, to remain in his position where he is qualified and capable of running the matter in Yemen ... Additionally, the presence of some of the characteristics by [sic] our brother Anwar al-'Awlaqi is a good thing, in order to serve *jihad*, and how excellent would it be if he gives us a chance to be introduced to him more... ask brother Basir [al-Wuhayshi] to send us the resume, in detail and lengthy, of brother Anwar al-'Awlaqi, as well as the facts he relied on when recommending him [as leader], while informing him that his recommendation is considered. However, we would like to be

¹⁰² Gregory Johnsen, 'The al-Awlaki Debate Continues,' (2010); Gregory Johnsen, 'A False Target in Yemen,' (2010); Jerrold M. Post, 'The Generation of Vipers: The Generational Provenance of Terrorists', *SAIS Review* 31, no. 2 (2011): 115-16; Denis MacEoin, 'Anwar al-Awlaki: "I Pray that Allah Destroys America"', *Middle East Quarterly* XVIII, no. 2 (2010); Michael Clarke and Valentina Soria, 'Terrorism: The New Wave', *RUSI Journal* 155, no. 4 (2010); Dean Alexander, 'al Qaeda and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: Inspired, Homegrown Terrorism in the United States', *Journal of Applied Security Research* 6, no. 4 (2011).

¹⁰³ Hegghammer, 'The Case for Chasing al-Awlaki.' The blog he mentions is now defunct.

¹⁰⁴ He signed off on articles in the first three editions of *Inspire*. The second question is also posed by Johnsen, 'The al-Awlaki Debate Continues'.

reassured more. For example, we here become reassured of the people when they go to the line and get examined there.¹⁰⁵

For bin Laden, *jihadi* authority and status was a product of time spent 'at the front' and therefore a prerequisite for any senior figure in al-Qa'ida. He recognised all too well that al-Awlaqi had little to offer the organisation in terms of operations. Essentially, he saw him as little more than a useful ideologue who could appeal to different constituencies in English and raise the organisation's profile. Nonetheless, as time went on, al-Awlaqi was increasingly considered – not by AQAP or al-Qa'ida's core, but by the West and the US in particular – as a major figure in AQAP and potent threat to security. He rapidly acquired descriptions as 'one of the principal *jihadi* luminaries for would-be homegrown terrorists... his fluency with English, his unabashed advocacy of *jihad* and *mujahideen* organizations, and his Web-savvy approach are a powerful combination'.¹⁰⁶ Intelligence officials began to describe him as 'Public Enemy number 1' and 'Terrorist No. 1, in terms of the threat against us'; indeed, Michael Leiter, Head of the US National Counterterrorism Center, went as far as to say that al-Awlaqi 'understood American psychology in a way that led him to try attacks that ... would be particularly terrorizing'.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the truth behind these characterisations, the crucial point is that, as a target of the Americans and major feature of the discourse on countering al-Qa'ida, al-Awlaqi began not only to impart greater kudos to the organisation, but also to acquire status and authority in global *jihadi* circles for himself, and as his standing and reputation grew, he increasingly became the first point of contact for a number of would-be western militants.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Osama bin Laden, 'Letter to 'Sheikh Mahmood' (SOCOM-2012-0000003),' (Combatting Terrorism Centre at West Point, 2010). See also Nelly Lahoud et al., 'Letters from Abbottabad: bin Laden Sidelined,' *Harmony Program* (Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ A phrase of Evan Kohlmann's, cited in Josh Meyer, 'Fort Hood shooting suspect's ties to mosque investigated,' *Los Angeles Times*, 9th November 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Scott Shane, 'U.S. Approves Targeted Killing of American Cleric,' *The New York Times*, 7th April 2010; Philip Johnston, 'Anwar al Awlaki: the new Osama bin Laden?,' *The Telegraph*, 17th September 2010; Catherine Herridge, 'Awlaki Tops Bin Laden as Top Terror Threat To U.S., Counterterrorism Official Says,' (2011); Voice of America, 'Al-Awlaki's Death Leaves Gap in al-Qaida,' 29th September 2011.

¹⁰⁸ The legal literature on the killing of al-Awlaqi is considerable and beyond the scope of this research. Useful articles include: Mark Hosenball, 'Secret panel can put Americans on kill list,' (2011); Robert Chesney, 'Who May Be Killed? Anwar al-Awlaki as a Case Study in the International Legal Regulation of Lethal Force,' *SSRN eLibrary* (2011), http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1754223 [accessed 22nd August 2012]; Robert Chesney, 'Al-Awlaki as an Operational Leader Located In a Place Where Capture Was Not Possible,' (2011); Daniel Bethlehem, 'Mopping up the Last War or Stumbling into the Next?,' *Harvard Law School National Security Journal* (2011); Bruce Ackerman, 'Obama's Death Panel,' *Foreign Policy*, 7th October 2011.

The 'Grassroots' Jihad

It was here that AQAP recognised the opportunity that al-Awlaqi presented, not as an operational planner responsible for centralised attacks, but as someone capable of organising a different kind of *jihad* – one which had little central planning or support, but which could exert considerable coercive force on their primary oppositions. This 'grassroots' *jihad* was, in effect, an extension of the 'attrition' script but it relied on inspiring violent Islamists abroad to invent their own *jihadi* enterprises away from Yemen. The grassroots strategy, however, relied on mobilising would-be and wannabe militants to adopt violence on AQAP's behalf, and here the central role was played by AQAP's media wing, which by mid-2010, was releasing a number of magazines in English, Arabic and even Urdu. The expansion of the media arm is probably related in part to the contribution of al-Awlaqi, but more importantly, it was Samir Khan, the editor of *Inspire*, whose arrival initiated the group's increasingly prolific (and prolix) media output.

The magazine followed the traditional schema established by *Sada al-Malahim* of establishing and describing scripts and cloaking them in a frame which provided religious justifications for violence; much of its material was merely translation of other articles, particularly those by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and bin Laden, and any new material was probably written by Samir Khan and al-Awlaqi. But later editions of the magazine began to extend the emphasis in line with al-Awlaqi's portfolio of inciting *jihad* abroad rather than attracting new recruits from the West into Yemen. In the second edition, an article entitled "Tips for Our Brothers in the United Snakes of America" made a series of recommendations to the would-be militant. Yahya Ibrahim, who wrote the article, begins by advising potential recruits to fight *jihad* on US soil; in part, this is about avoiding detection: 'if you are clean, stay clean. Avoid contact with jihadi minded individuals. Do not visit jihadi websites. Do not keep in your possession any suspicious materials'; indeed, Ibrahim advises acquiring published material by going to respected, non-Islamic organisations which publish *jihadi* material like SITE or MEMRI.¹⁰⁹

By galvanising hangers-on, 'wannabes' and homegrown initiates through the two stage process described above (first, delineating and describing strategic scripts and second, ensconcing the scripts in motivational grievance-based frames), so the rationale went, the attritional strategy (of which the US was the primary target) could be pursued on multiple fronts. In effect, then, al-Awlaqi took responsibility for those interested in 'self-starter' *jihad*, in which interested parties contacted him and presented their plan; this could then be adapted

¹⁰⁹al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Inspire 2,' (al-Malahim Media, 2010), 55.

to suit the priorities and peculiarities of the situation, as well as to conform to the organisation's attritional script before being approved. Indeed, al-Awlaqi's contact with violent Islamists in the US is telling. As early as the summer of 2008, al-Awlaqi was in e-mail contact with Barry Bujol, an American citizen, who sought advice on how to wage *jihad* and how to start up an untraceable website, to which he responded by sending a document he had written entitled '*44 Ways to Support Jihad*'.¹¹⁰ al-Awlaqi was also in contact with Zachary Chesser, later arrested in the US for inciting violence against the makers of *South Park* whose 200th episode depicted the Prophet Muhammad. One of his most notable exchanges, however, was with Nidal Malik Hassan, a major in the US Army who had previously attended the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Virginia when Anwar al-Awlaqi was Imam there. He sought guidance on the role and legitimacy of violence via e-mail and, in one of these communications, he tells al-Awlaqi,

There are many soldiers in the us armed forces that have converted to Islam while in the service... Some appear to have internal conflicts and have even killed or tried to kill other us soldiers in the name of Islam i.e. Hasan Akbar, etc... Can you make some general comments about Muslims in the u.s. military. Would you consider someone like Hasan Akbar or other soldiers that have committed such acts with the goal of helping Muslims/Islam ... fighting Jihad and if they did die would you consider them shaheeds [martyrs].¹¹¹

In November 2009, a few weeks after the exchange, Hassan opened fire at the Fort Hood Army Base where he worked, killing thirteen people, twelve of them soldiers.¹¹² Although al-Awlaqi replied only three times to Hassan's numerous e-mails and never advocated violence, in time he would adopt a more strategic role in e-mail exchanges by advising would-be militants to take particular courses of action. The dialogue between al-Awlaqi and another grassroots *mujahideen*, Rajib Karim, reveals precisely this growing interest in strategy. Rajib Karim had spent time in Dhaka with his brother Tehzeeb, raising funds for *Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh*. In September 2007, Rajib came to the UK and gained employment as a graduate IT trainee at BA. The original idea was to attack BA computer systems

¹¹⁰ Evan Perez, 'U.S. Terror Suspect Arrested,' *Wall Street Journal*, 3rd June 2010. Anwar al-Awlaqi, '*44 Ways to Support Jihad*,' (n.p., 2009).

¹¹¹ The quotation is left precisely as was written by Hassan. For the publicly available emails, see William H. Webster Commission, 'The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Counterterrorism Intelligence, and the Events at Fort Hood, Texas on November 5, 2009,' (2012).

¹¹² Joseph Lieberman, *Ticking Time Bomb: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from the US Government's Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack* (DIANE Publishing, 2011). The report actually makes very little comment about al-Awlaqi, other than acknowledging his role in other cases of 'lone wolf' terrorism.

electronically in order to cause chaos and significant financial damage. On 29 January 2010, Rajib Karim replied to al-Awlaqi, saying:

I have knowledge about the key people in BA [British Airways] starting from the top management and the key people in BA IT department. I also have knowledge about key IT hardware locations, which if targeted can bring huge disruption to flights and cause BA a major financial loss ... but this would be at the risk of exposing myself as I will have to do that with my own login ID...¹¹³

In al-Awlaqi's eyes, the attack on infrastructure was insufficient as, indeed, was the UK as a target. For al-Awlaqi it had to be a significant attack on the US:

Our highest priority is the US. Anything there, even if on a smaller scale compared to what we may do in the UK, would be our choice. So the question is: with the people you have, is it possible to get a package or a person with a package on board a flight heading to the US? If that is not possible, then what ideas do you have that could be set up for the UK? ...¹¹⁴

In the end, the attack was intercepted and on 25 February 2010, Karim was arrested. However, the attempted attack does demonstrate the growing authority of al-Awlaqi and his influence over foreign recruits. A grassroots *jihad*, based on an extension of the 'attrition and mobilisation' script, therefore emerged as al-Awlaqi grew in *jihadi* stature and the leadership recognised the advantages of bringing him formally into the group. The portfolio required little understanding of tactics, (indeed, some of the tactics outlined in *Inspire*, such as attaching lawn mower blades to cars, impinge on the ludicrous), operational requirements or of foreign security procedures; rather it simply required someone to assess whether a project was strategically appropriate and to sign it off if so, or modify it if not. AQAP's 'strategy of a thousand cuts', as they termed it, therefore improvised on their existing 'attrition and mobilisation' script. Rather than simply seeking to mobilise locally – that is, to mobilise the Yemeni population or incite would-be *mujahideen* to come to Yemen – they sought to mobilise their supporters wherever they were based and, in so doing, to implement their strategy of attrition against the US on multiple fronts.

By way of summary, it is useful at this point to draw these threads together. AQAP essentially deployed terrorist violence in an attempt to wear down its oppositions, both in Yemen and beyond. Attrition works, as we saw in Chapter 1, by depriving the opposition of its means: the

¹¹³ Thomas Joscelyn, 'Awlaki's E-mails to Terror Plotter Show Operational Role,' (2011).

¹¹⁴ J. M. Berger, 'Two E-Mails From Anwar Awlaki,' (2012).

persistent assassination of security personnel, so the logic ran, will reduce the opposition's ability to pursue the perpetrators; campaigns of violence against political figures or the general population will reduce the political will to challenge the culprits; and repeated acts of terror, centralised and de-centralised, against the West will coerce it to re-think its (financial, military and diplomatic) relationship with the local government. In this sense, AQAP's attritional script was an attempt to reduce the gap between one's own means and those of one's opposition, where means are cast in the broadest possible terms to include not just military supplies, human personnel and financial resources, but political will and popular support for the conflict. In following this attritional script, AQAP deployed violence against the regime on numerous occasions, maintaining a long-term policy of assassinating senior military and intelligence figures, as well as executing surprise attacks on checkpoints and police patrols and attacking political figures. Although none of these attacks was meant, in and of itself, to bring about the fall of the regime, together AQAP saw them as a way of eroding the regime's access to military personnel (senior members in particular) and financial reserves in addition to reducing political and popular will for the fight. Violence deployed against the far enemy was similarly viewed in attritional terms. Repeated attempts against both western diplomatic and touristic presence in Yemen was part of a long-standing attempt to wear down the commitment of the West to remain *in situ*.

Attacks against the aviation industry, were, by AQAP's own admission, less an attempt to reduce the opposition's military resources and more an attempt to reduce their financial capabilities; as a long but enlightening quote from the special edition of *Inspire* released after the cargo plot had been intercepted:

Two Nokia mobiles, \$150 each, two HP printers, \$300 each, plus shipping, transportation and other miscellaneous expenses add up to a total bill of \$4,200. That is all what [sic] Operation Hemorrhage cost us. In terms of time it took us three months to plan and execute the operation from beginning to end. On the other hand this supposedly "foiled plot", as some of our enemies would like to call, will without a doubt cost America and other Western countries billions of dollars in new security measures. That is what we call leverage.... From the start our objective was economic. Bringing down a cargo plane would only kill a pilot and co-pilot. It is true that blowing up the planes in the sky would add to the element of fear and shock but that would have been an additional advantage to the operation and not a determining factor of its success.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Yahya Ibrahim: \$4200,' *Inspire 3* (al-Malahim Media, 2010), 15.

By the same token, the grassroots *jihad* developed and expanded upon the attrition script. In effect, the 'strategy of a thousand cuts' sought to increase the number of attacks, whilst necessarily reducing their lethality, in order to erode the resources and resolve of the US.

'Any Muslim who wants to participate in *jihad* and the Resistance, can participate in this battle against America or anywhere, which is perhaps hundreds of times more effective than what he is able to do if he arrived at the open area of confrontation'.¹¹⁶

Persistent but minor acts of terrorism, so the logic went, would exhaust the enemy and force them to withdraw. Indeed, AQAP were quite clear about how the grassroots *jihad* would function: 'This strategy of attacking the enemy with smaller, but more frequent operations is... the strategy of a thousand cuts. The aim is to bleed the enemy to death'.¹¹⁷ The result was an attritional strategy which sought not to annihilate the enemy with a single *coup de grâce*, but to weaken him with a thousand tiny cuts until, in the words of Robert Taber, he 'becomes too weakened – in military terms, over-extended; in political terms, too unpopular; in economic terms, too expensive – to defend himself'.¹¹⁸ Or to put it in the words of Faisal Shahzad, who had contacted al-Awlaqi and then attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, 'brace yourselves, because the war with Muslims has just begun. Consider me only a first droplet of the blood...'.¹¹⁹

Ansar al-Shari'a: Insurgency and Nation-Building

But whilst attrition of the enemy's morale and will can force them to withdraw, AQAP recognised that it was insufficient for bringing about political objectives in the form of establishing an Islamic state in Yemen. For al-Wuhayshi, the defeat of the near enemy required a full-blown insurgency involving the occupation of territory. In this sense, he clearly viewed the grassroots *jihad* against the far enemy as the first stage of attrition – forcing a withdrawal of the West – to be open to the path for the second stage of attrition – forcing the withdrawal and collapse of the near enemy. As a translation from Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's work, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, quoted at length in *Inspire*, makes absolutely clear:

The *jihad* of [the] individual is fundamental for exhausting the enemy and causing him to collapse and withdraw. [By contrast] the Open Front Jihad is fundamental for seizing control over land in

¹¹⁶ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Abu Mus'ab al-Suri: *Jihadi* Experiences,' *Inspire* 2 (al-Malahim Media, 2010), 21.

¹¹⁷ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Inspire 3.'

¹¹⁸ Taber, *The War of the Flea*: 29.

¹¹⁹ Bruce Golding, 'Times Sq. bomber's vile rant as he gets life in jail,' *New York Post*, 6th October 2010.

order to liberate it, and establish Islamic law, with the help of Allah. The Individual Terrorism *Jihad* ... paves the way for the other kind (Open Front Jihad), aids and supports it. Without confrontation in the field and seizure of land, however, a state will not emerge for us. And this is the strategic goal for the Resistance project.¹²⁰

As AQAP adapted and expanded its attrition script, with some success, so they began to examine ways for proceeding to the second stage of the script: insurgency. This came, in late 2010, in the form of an alliance with a nebulous organisation called *Ansar al-Shari'a*. The exact relationship between *Ansar al-Shari'a* and AQAP remains a topic of contention. For some, *Ansar al-Shari'a* and AQAP are identifying terms which are used interchangeably on the ground and they argue that the insurgent wing of AQAP, *Ansar al-Shari'a* has little autonomy over its operations and is broadly tasked with the occupation of territory and recruitment of local militants into the cause.¹²¹ For others, in contrast, it is a separate organisation, characterised by an autonomous leadership which plans and executes operations without authorisation from AQAP leadership.¹²²

All of which begs the question: what is *Ansar al-Shari'a*? As an organisation, *Ansar al-Shari'a* is likely to consist of the Islamist 'clusters', such as the AAIA and YIG, that escalated and receded in the 1990s on the one hand and disaffected *qabili* [tribal] elements on the other.¹²³ Increasingly, one suspects, they have successfully brought new recruits from local communities in Yemen to the cause. There is evidence for the analysis that *Ansar al-Shari'a* is a separate entity which has become increasingly intertwined with its dominant 'terrorist' partner, AQAP, in a mutually beneficial alliance. In the first place, *Ansar al-Shari'a* demonstrably has its own leader, its own nascent media wing and, in adopting the same moniker as Abu Hamza's Supporters of Shari'a (in Arabic, this translates as *Ansar al-Shari'a*) its own group identity. In the second place, the photographic evidence shows all members wearing local tribal dress codes rather than the range of *galabiyet* from Saudi Arabia and previous fronts in the *jihad* popularised in AQAP photos and videos.¹²⁴ In the third place, in contrast to AQAP, the organisation's primary concern seems to resolve local grievances – fragile infrastructure, food scarcity and water shortage – by attacking the police and military rather than attacking the 'far enemy' outside Yemen.

¹²⁰ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Inspire 3.'

¹²¹ Frontline, 'Al Qaeda In Yemen,' (PBS, 2012); Johnsen, 'Frontline: al-Qaeda in Yemen'; *ibid.*; Ruth Spencer, 'In case you missed it: the 'Al Qaeda in Yemen' live chat,' (2012).

¹²² Benedict Wilkinson, 'What is the link between Ansar al-Sharia and Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula?,' (2012).

¹²³ Interview with 'Bob' (former British Intelligence official with specialty in the Gulf), Skype, 4th May 2012.

¹²⁴ Interview with 'Bob' (former British Intelligence official with specialty in the Gulf), Skype, 4th May 2012.

Under this interpretation, then, *Ansar al-Sharia* is a semi-autonomous organisation which is unlikely to clear every operation through the AQAP leadership but which has formed a very close co-operative alliance with AQAP. The alliance provides benefits to both parties: for *Ansar al-Shari'a*, AQAP provide an aura of legitimacy and the authority of an established group and, in so doing, lend a certain credibility to their operations; for AQAP, *Ansar al-Shari'a* play an important narrational role in disseminating a more local and populist account of the organisation, whilst simultaneously increasing the pressure on an already weak Yemeni government. Indeed, *Ansar al-Shari'a* has been highly effective in their attempts to erode the military resources of the Yemeni regime; in June 2011, they occupied the major towns of Zinjibar and Rada'a and succeeded in holding on to them, despite the deployment of significant government forces against them. Nevertheless, attrition through insurgency has its drawbacks, as we saw for the EIG. The strategy usually involves eroding public confidence and morale, and the general population is often negatively affected: innocent civilians caught in the conflict between the government and the terrorists are unlikely to show deep support for either party. As with the EIG, AQAP and *Ansar al-Shari'a*, in recent months, seem to have recognised the need to acquire legitimacy and popular support if the second stage of the attrition strategy is to be successful and have, in response, instigated a broader 'nation-building' strategy, providing basic utilities (water and electricity) in occupied towns and villages, dispensing medical supplies, mending roads and even establishing courts. This is clearly an effort to build popular support for the organisation and in so doing, to mitigate the negative effects of their script of attrition. Bearing in mind that this is a relatively recent development, it remains to be seen how effective this strategy will be.

Responding to Terrorism in Yemen: Attrition, Coalition and Pre-emption

As we saw in the Egypt case study, the problem with attrition is that oppositions rarely allow themselves to be exhausted without some kind of a fight. In the case of Yemen, the regime responded, like Saudi Arabia, to Islamist violence with repression on the one hand and pre-emption and prevention on the other. In part, this diverse response was the product of a finely balanced political system in which tribal loyalties and patronage networks require delicate handling of detractors, even where violence is involved. On the other hand, it was a consequence of the regime's weak financial resources and limited control of swathes of its own territory, which not only severely hampered its ability to challenge violent Islamist opposition, but also led other wealthier states in the Gulf and the West to provide significant

quantities of aid, counter-terrorism assistance and, in the case of the US, to initiate a campaign of drone strikes on Yemeni territory. It is important to examine these responses in detail, not least because they have received scant attention in the secondary material, but also because the way in which governments have responded to AQAP's 'attrition and mobilisation' strategy has been the decisive factor in the partial success (or to put it another way, the lack of failure) of that strategy.

Repression

Although repression has not been the only response of the Yemeni regime, it has formed a major strand of their effort to counter violent Islamism. Essentially, repression is akin to the military script of annihilation: it is an attempt to crush the opposition by depriving it of all or most of its means and, in so doing, attempts to render all strategies for achieving political ambitions conclusively unworkable. As we saw in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, repression normally consists of several elements, all of which were present in Yemeni counter-terrorism strategy: mass arrest of Islamists, both violent and moderate; brutality and torture towards suspects; detention without trial; (extraordinary) rendition; and, less frequently, military responses against training camps and operational bases.

The primary and most visible of these elements was mass arrest. Perhaps surprisingly, the research revealed no evidence of *any* arrests of Islamists for ideological reasons before the attack on the USS *Cole*, with the exception of Abu Hassan and members of the AAIA who were convicted of forming an armed group and kidnapping Westerners. To put it another way, it was only in the aftermath of the attack on the USS *Cole* that the regime moved against violent (and non-violent) Islamists on Yemeni territory: 35 Islamists were arrested in December 2000, thirteen a month later and in June 2001, another fifteen were arrested.¹²⁵ The first *mass* arrest of Islamists in Yemen in which individuals were picked up on the basis of their ideology, rather than their involvement in any criminal offence, however, took place in the immediate aftermath of 9/11; an Amnesty International report noted that by the end of 2001, 'the exact number of people arrested in the wake of 11 September who remained in detention was not known; the government acknowledged 21 arrests while press reports indicated up to 500 were detained'.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights Watch World Report 2002 - Yemen,' (2002).

¹²⁶ Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 2002 - Yemen,' (2002), 3. My own informal interviews suggested that 'several hundred' were picked up.

Although it is difficult to be clear over numbers, it seems that it was only in the wake of 9/11 that mass arrest rose to the fore as an overt strand of counter-terrorism strategy in Yemen. In 2003, an Amnesty International report agreed with this analysis, stating:

Prior to the 11 September events the government maintained that while it was not perfect, any arbitrary arrest taking place in the country was not the result of government policy. After 11 September, the government's message to Amnesty International has been articulated as the "fight against terrorism" to preserve the security of the country which necessitates action by the arresting authorities beyond the confines of the law.¹²⁷

This was backed up by political statements in September 2001, when Yemen was 'placed under a *de facto* state of emergency', and the Prime Minister announced that the regime had 'decided that investigations must be carried out into anyone who had any connection... [with] Afghanistan'.¹²⁸ Thereafter, mass arrests continued to be a central strand of Yemeni counter-terrorism strategy from 2002 until at least 2005. Indeed, as Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, the speaker of the Yemeni parliament and leader of *Islah*, said, 'hundreds if not thousands of people [have] been unfairly detained in Yemen since 11 September 2001'.¹²⁹

The mass arrest of Islamists was frequently accompanied by allegations of torture and brutality. Human rights observers, both western and Yemeni, have long noted that torture is rife in Yemeni detention facilities and a special inquiry set up by the Yemeni Parliament noted in 2002 that 'Some detainees... said they were beaten with electric batons, handcuffed and shackled, and subjected to insults and verbal abuse. Others said they were threatened with the imprisonment of their female relatives if they did not confess'.¹³⁰ Similarly, Yemenis repatriated from Guantánamo Bay were all immediately detained by the Political Security Organisation often without access to their families or legal counsel for several months. One returnee from Guantánamo Bay told Human Rights Watch that he 'was tortured for five days, from nine in the morning until dawn. The cell was dark. They beat me with shoes. There were insults, bad words and threats to do bad things to my female relatives and to imprison my father'.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Amnesty International, 'Yemen: the Rule of Law Sidelined in the Name of Security,' (2003), 6.

¹²⁸ Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 2002 - Yemen,' 2.

¹²⁹ Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 2003 - Yemen,' (2003), 2.

¹³⁰ Amnesty International, 'Yemen: the Rule of Law Sidelined in the Name of Security,' 8.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch, 'No Direction Home: Returns from Guantanamo to Yemen,' (2009), 43.

Although Yemen's human rights record, particularly in terms of profligate arrests, detention without trial and torture – not to mention its virtually non-existent legislative framework for dealing with threats to national security – makes for grim reading, it is worth noting that Yemen's record towards violent Islamists was less damning than on first inspection. Widespread arrests in the period under study were common, but stood as a tiny proportion of Egypt's which between 1992 and 1997 totalled more than 47,000; indeed, mass arrests of violent Islamists are dwarfed by the Yemeni regime's far more extensive detention of and brutality towards thousands of southern Yemenis protesting against the regime.¹³² This is not to provide the regime with a veneer of legitimacy, but to stress the fact that repression is one element in a broader range of scripts that have been pursued against violent Islamists in Yemen at various periods since 1990. It is also to recognise the fact that Yemen's patronage system, which, as we shall see, necessitates scripts of 'bargaining' and 'accommodation', is ill-suited to repression.

De-capitation

Repression is an ends-oriented script. Its aims ruthlessly to deprive the opposition of material resources in the form of personnel, territory, weaponry and finances. In the face of the threat of violent Islamism in Yemen, however, both the US government and the Yemeni regime increasingly opted for a more nuanced script in an effort to limit their means. 'Decapitation' is a way of removing the opposition leadership, rationalised as the strategic and/or ideological driving force behind violent Islamist organisations, leaving the middle and lower ranks bereft of the architects of violence and unable to deploy highly complex and lethal forms of violence. Equally, decapitation can work by depriving an organisation of its 'specialists'. The elimination of high profile ideologues, expert bomb-makers and propagandists can put an organisation on the back foot; as Daniel Byman notes,

Bomb makers, terrorism trainers, forgers, recruiters, and terrorist leaders are scarce; they need many months, if not years, to gain enough expertise to be effective. When these individuals are arrested or killed, their organizations are disrupted. The groups may still be able to attract recruits, but lacking expertise, these new recruits will not pose the same kind of threat.¹³³

For Audrey Kurth Cronin, decapitating an organisation by arresting its leaders is more effective than through targeted assassination; as she phrases it, 'there is nothing glamorous

¹³² Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention,' 78.

¹³³ Byman, 'Do Targeted Killings Work', 103-04.

about languishing in jail'.¹³⁴ Indeed, the majority of studies which have examined the impact of targeted assassination (whether through drone strikes or other methods) have concluded that it is unsuccessful, often counter-productive.¹³⁵

In the case of Yemen's violent Islamist movement, decapitation by arrest and targeted killing have both been central elements of the government's counter-terrorist posture. The first leader to be arrested was Tariq al-Fadhli in the aftermath of the 1992 attacks on hotels in Aden. As suggested earlier, his arrest was little more than a face-saving gesture to the US and he was released only months later to bolster the regime's forces in the Civil War with the south. The arrest and subsequent execution of Abu Hassan, al-Fadhli's opposite number in the AAIA, by contrast, left the organisation leaderless and it effectively receded into the broader Islamist movement for the foreseeable future. Equally, the arrest of key al-Qa'ida figures, Jamal al-Badawi and Fahd al-Quso, in combination with the drone strike on Abu Ali al-Harithi in 2002, dealt bin Laden's small but important presence in Yemen a *coup de grâce*.

Drone strikes have become an increasingly prominent and contentious feature of the counter-terrorism effort in Yemen. 2012 witnessed such a dramatic intensification in airstrikes that, by early September, there was an average of nearly one every week – up from fewer than one a month in 2011 and one every six months in 2009.¹³⁶ In 2012 alone, airstrikes were responsible for the death of 193 people, 35 of whom were civilians and the remainder alleged members of AQAP or its subsidiaries.¹³⁷ Despite this increase, close analysis of the history of drone strikes in Yemen reveals that they have limited effect on the movements targeted. The elimination of both Anwar al-Awlaqi and Samir Khan in September 2011, for example, produced something of a hiatus in AQAP's propaganda output, but by May 2012, Yahya

¹³⁴ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 17.

¹³⁵ See e.g. Jordan, 'When Heads Roll: Assessing The Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation', 'decapitated groups have a lower rate of decline than groups that have not had their leaders removed (p.753). See also, Or Honig, 'Explaining Israel's Misuse of Strategic Assassinations', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (2007); Mohammed M. Hafez and Joseph Hatfield, 'Do Targeted Assassinations Work? A Multivariate Analysis of Israel's Controversial Tactic during Al-Aqsa Uprising 1', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 4 (2006); Jordan, 'When Heads Roll: Assessing The Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation'; Byman, 'Do Targeted Killings Work'; Price, 'Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism'; Aaron Mannes, 'Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing its Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?', *The Journal of International Policy Solutions* 9 (2008). Johnston, 'Does Decapitation Work?: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns', provides statistical evidence to the contrary, arguing that decapitation can limit the effectiveness of an insurgency, that killing a leader is more effective than arrest, and that the 'costs of failed targeting do not outweigh the benefits of successful targeting'. (p.77).

¹³⁶ These figures are taken from Bill Roggio and Bob Barry, 'The Covert US Air Campaign in Yemen,' (2012).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Ibrahim had taken over the role as editor of *Inspire* and immediately released two new editions.¹³⁸ Indeed, in the latter of these, he made specific comment on the death of his predecessors, saying that *Inspire*

is here to stay because it was not found [sic] to end with the end of its founders. Rather, with their end, it would only become deep-rooted and its objectives would become clearer. This magazine was set up to fulfill [sic] two objectives. The first one is to call for and inspire to jihad [sic] in the English speaking world and second one is to deliver to every inspired Muslim anywhere around the world the operational know-how of carrying out attacks from within the West. *Inspire* is and will be an effective tool regardless of who is in charge of it, as long as it aims at fulfilling those mentioned objectives. Hence, we are still spreading the word and we are still publishing America's worst nightmare.¹³⁹

Further attempts by the US to decapitate AQAP have been unsuccessful: the elimination in May 2012 of Fahd al-Quso who played a major role in the attack on the USS *Cole* has, at the time of writing, had a negligible impact on the organisation. Most recently, the drone strike which killed Sa'id al-Shihri in September 2012 has not as yet prevented AQAP's ability to project violence in Yemen; it remains to be seen whether the loss of al-Shihri has a longer term impact on the organisation's ability to deploy terrorist violence against the far enemy abroad.

Indeed, the only targeted killing which had any long-term impact on a violent Islamist group in Yemen was that of Abu Ali al-Harithi in 2002. His al-Qa'ida presence in Yemen, as we have seen, possessed unique features which made it particularly susceptible to 'decapitation'. al-Harithi headed up only a very small al-Qa'ida presence which was predominantly preoccupied with facilitating and organizing al-Nashiri's *jihad* in Yemen. This limited presence meant that the drone strike was a one-off incident in contrast with the much larger campaign of drone strikes against targets related (often tenuously) to AQAP. In turn, this meant that it was far easier to retain public support for the Yemeni and US governments. A second and related point to note is that Abu Ali's organisation was essentially hierarchical. Abu Ali occupied the leadership role, supported by other figures such as Fahd al-Quso and Jamal al-

¹³⁸Howard LaFranchi, 'US covert attacks in Yemen: A better template for the war on terror?,' *Christian Science Monitor*, 15th June 2011; Patrik Jonsson, 'Will Yemen air strike change view of Fort Hood shooting?,' *Christian Science Monitor*, 24th December 2009; Bobby Ghosh, 'Has the Alleged Fort Hood Gunman's Imam Been Silenced?,' *Time*, 24th November 2009; CNN, 'Most wanted: Anwar al-Awlaki,' (2011); Agence France Presse, 'Drone attack kills 10 Qaeda suspects in South Yemen,' (2011).

¹³⁹ al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Letter from the Editor, Yahya Ibrahim,' *Inspire* 9 (al-Malahim Media, 2012), 4.

Badawi; beneath that were the fringe elements tasked by the leadership with minor responsibilities. Once Abu Ali had been eliminated and his two deputies arrested, al-Qa'ida's presence in Yemen was limited to those fringe elements who had no experience or expertise in waging a campaign of violence.

This episode neatly illustrates the way in which successful decapitation works: the elimination of a single leader, primarily responsible for driving an organisation forward, can leave lower ranks unable to organise themselves and unsure of how to proceed. But in the case of larger organisations and movements like AQAP, there are significant difficulties. The first problem for the strategy, particularly US strategy in Yemen, is that drone strikes have tended to fall into the trap of mission creep: the campaign is no longer about decapitating AQAP, but about ridding Yemen of all AQAP personnel, whether key players or marginal participants. Of the 33 confirmed US strikes against AQAP in 2012, less than a third can be described as targeting key members of the leadership or those with specialist skills (e.g. bomb makers and recruiters). To put it more contentiously, of the 193 deaths through drone strikes, only five of those killed have had a significant leadership or operational role in AQAP.¹⁴⁰ The second problem is that drone strikes can produce backlashes from one's opposition as they have with AQAP. The day after Sa'id al-Shihri had been killed in a drone strike, the Minister of Defence, Major General Muhammad Nasir Ahmad, survived an assassination attempt when a booby-trapped car exploded next to his motorcade killing 12.¹⁴¹ The assassination of Ali Mahmud al-Qasaylah in 2007, the first al-Qa'ida attack since the prison break, was claimed in retaliation for the targeted killing of Abu Ali al-Harithi in 2002.¹⁴² Equally, the attempted attacks of both Faisal Shahzad and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab were claimed as retaliations to the deaths of Muslims at US hands in Yemen, the former saying 'I'm going to plead guilty a hundred times over until the hour the US ... stops the drone strikes in Somalia and Yemen and in Pakistan'.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ In 2012, there were two attempts against Qasim al-Raymi, the first on 7 April (Agence France Presse, 'Yemen air force, U.S. drone kill 24 Qaeda suspects,' (2012).); the second was on 10 May (Agence France Presse, 'Yemen 'al-Qaeda fighters' killed in air raids,' (2012).). There was one attempt against Nasir al-Wuhayshi (7 April). On 30 April, Abu Hummam al-Zarqawi, nephew of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was targeted and killed. Salah al-Jawhari, a bomb-maker attached to Ansar al-Shari'a was killed; on 22 April, Ghareeb al-Taizi was eliminated. Further deaths, already noted, were those of Fahd al-Quso and Sa'id al-Shihri.

¹⁴¹ CNN, 'Yemeni defense minister survives apparent assassination attempt,' 11th September 2012; Iona Craig, '13 die in blast targeting Yemen's defense minister,' *USA Today*, 11th September 2012.

¹⁴² Gregory Johnsen, 'Is Al-Qaeda in Yemen Regrouping,' *Terrorism Focus* 4, no. 15 (2007).

¹⁴³ Benjamin Weiser and Colin Moynihan, 'A Guilty Plea In Plot to Bomb Times Square,' *The New York Times*, 22nd June 2010.

The third and greatest problem with 'decapitation through targeted killing' is that it can create deep resentment and anger among local populations. When drone strikes form part of a longer campaign and bad targeting, civilian deaths and debates over the morality of the campaign are almost inevitable, local populations can begin to sympathise with, often support, the opposition whose means one is trying to limit. US-Yemeni political manoeuvring in late 2009 suggests that both governments were particularly concerned about this potential for what they termed 'blowback'. A leaked diplomatic cable of a meeting between President Saleh and General Petraeus just days before the attempted attack of Abdulmutallab in December 2009, suggests conclusively that the Yemeni regime would take the credit for US drone strikes in an attempt to lend the campaign legitimacy and to reduce anti-US sentiment:

Saleh lamented the use of cruise missiles that are "not very accurate" and welcomed the use of aircraft-deployed precision-guided bombs instead. "We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," Saleh said, prompting Deputy Prime Minister Alimi to joke that he had just "lied" by telling Parliament that the bombs in Arhab, Abyan, and Shebwa were American-made but deployed by the ROYG.

Further meetings between the Yemenis and the Ambassador focused on how to present US participation in and responsibility for air strikes if its role in leading the campaign came out into the open. One case was particularly problematic in that it involved the substantial loss of civilian life: Abdul Elah Hider Shayea, a Yemeni journalist, found evidence that the attack on al-Ma'ajalah in May 2009 (which resulted in the tragic deaths of at least 14 children and 21 women) had been an American operation.¹⁴⁴ In a meeting between the Yemenis and the US on 20 December 2009, the two parties discussed how to limit damage to both countries' reputations. The Yemenis felt that anti-US sentiment could be prevented by repeated assertions of the media line; the US recognised that the evidence was overwhelming and a more 'nuanced' position was required:

[Deputy Prime Minister] Alimi told the Ambassador that Saleh was undisturbed by press reports citing U.S. officials asserting American involvement in the [drone] operations, saying that the

¹⁴⁴ The Yemeni regime responded, typically, with repression. In the first instance he was repeatedly threatened and then arrested on charges of supporting al-Qa'ida and acting as a media advisor to Anwar al-Awlaqi. The story goes on: although he was to receive a presidential pardon in 2011, a telephone call between Ali Abdullah Saleh and President Obama (in which the latter expressed concerns over the release) ensured his continued detention. Jeremy Scahill, 'Why Is President Obama Keeping a Journalist in Prison in Yemen?', *The Nation*, 13th March 2012. Molly Ochs, 'Yemen: New Government, Same Challenges to Press Freedom,' (International Press Institute, 2012). The truth behind Shayea's story is verified by Wikileaks cables, see, 'US embassy cables: Yemen trumpets strikes on al-Qaida that were Americans' work,' (2010).

ROYG "must maintain the status quo" with regard to the official denial of U.S. involvement in order to ensure additional "positive operations" against AQAP ... The Ambassador cautioned Alimi that the ROYG may need to nuance its position regarding US involvement in the event more evidence surfaces, complicating its ability to adhere to the official line that ROYG forces conducted the operations independently. Alimi appeared confident that any evidence of greater US involvement – such as US munitions found at the sites – could be explained away as equipment purchased from the US.¹⁴⁵

In the event, the US assessment was accurate. Yemeni journalists and opposition politicians had long claimed that the drone campaign was run by the US but definitive proof came with the release of diplomatic cables in the Wikileaks scandal. The role of the US in the drone campaigns has led to significant loss of support for both the regime and the US in Yemen, despite the assertions of John Brennan that

contrary to conventional wisdom, we see little evidence that these actions are generating widespread anti-American sentiment or recruits for AQAP. In fact, we see the opposite, our Yemeni partners are more eager to work with us. Yemeni citizens who have been freed from the hellish grip of AQAP are more eager, not less, to work with the Yemeni government. In short, targeted strikes against the most senior and most dangerous AQAP terrorists are not the problem, they are part of the solution.¹⁴⁶

In retrospect, it is difficult to support Brennan's claims that targeted killings have not produced anger in Yemen. In August and September 2012, there were anti-US protests, often joined by leading tribal sheikhs.¹⁴⁷ The mis-directed strike in May 2012 which killed Jaber al-Shabwani, the deputy governor of Ma'arib who was *en route* to a negotiation with local AQAP elements in an effort to persuade them to relinquish violence, provoked his tribe to sabotage Yemen's largest oil pipeline, costing the government more than a billion dollars in lost revenue. The most recent set of protests, in retaliation for a blasphemous film about the Prophet Muhammad, saw hundreds storm the Embassy and burn the US flag; this local resentment of the US, buoyed on the long campaign of drone strikes, has actually forced President Obama into deploying further marines to protect the Embassy.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ 'US embassy cables: Yemen trumpets strikes on al-Qaida that were Americans' work'.

¹⁴⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, 'U.S. Policy Toward Yemen: A transcript of John O. Brennan on PBS Newshour,' 2012.

¹⁴⁷ Hakim Almasmari, 'Suspected U.S. drone strike kills civilians in Yemen, officials say,' (2012); Julian Borger, 'Protesters storm US embassy in Yemen over anti-Islam film,' *The Guardian*, 13th September 2012; Xinhua, 'Yemenis protest botched U.S. drone strikes,' 4th September 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Reuters, 'Yemen says deployment of U.S. Marines is temporary,' 17th September 2012.

This is the problem for 'decapitation by targeted assassination' script: although it is designed to limit the operational capacity of an opposition by removing those vital leaders and specialists able to design and construct violence, it has the potential to provide means in the form of political support for an opposition. Assassinated leaders are martyred, their political goals legitimised, the grievances which support those goals are realised and the organisation, whilst it loses experience and leadership, gains in recruits and public sympathy. The recent American campaign of 'decapitation by drone strike' has had precisely this effect. Others, both in the US and Yemen, concur: Robert Grenier, former head of the CIA's Counter-Terrorism Centre stated that 'the US would be wise to calibrate its actions in Yemen in such a way as to avoid making that obscure and relatively limited and containable threat into the Arabian equivalent of Waziristan'.¹⁴⁹ Ansaff Ali Mayo, head of *Islah* in Aden felt that that stage was rapidly approaching: 'there is more hostility against America because the attacks have not stopped al-Qaeda, but rather they have expanded, and the tribes feel this is a violation of the country's sovereignty...There is a psychological acceptance of al-Qaeda because of the U.S. strikes'.¹⁵⁰

To sum up, the Yemen case study suggests that decapitation by arrest or elimination of leaders can be successful. The AAIA was deprived of its leader twice; the capture of Abu Hassan followed by his execution in early 1999 was a major blow which was compounded by the almost immediate capture of Hetam bin Farid. The organisation reeled, violence receded and the organisation disengaged. Similarly, the strike which eliminated Abu Ali al-Harithi in 2002, followed swiftly by the capture of Fahd al-Quso and Jamal al-Badawi effectively dismantled al-Qa'ida's entire presence in Yemen at the time; certainly, there were other major figures involved in planning violence from Saudi Arabia – Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri chief amongst them – but they were equally captured in the mass arrests discussed in the previous chapter. Why then has the latest decapitation attempt been unsuccessful? Part of the problem, as we have seen, is that the US drone campaign is no longer a script of decapitation, but one of attrition. It has shifted from targeting senior leaders and specialists to targeting any individual linked to AQAP and in so doing has actually created support for the organisation by engaging in what is widely considered to be an immoral and extrajudicial war. The second and perhaps more obvious problem with the script is that AQAP is no longer a centralised organisation. As the previous section attempted to demonstrate, AQAP increasingly attempts to incite *jihad* abroad rather than to organise and fund it solely from Yemen. Equally, its alliance partner,

¹⁴⁹ Robert Grenier, 'Yemen and the US: Down a familiar path,' (2012).

¹⁵⁰ Sudarsan Raghavan, 'In Yemen, U.S. airstrikes breed anger, and sympathy for al-Qaeda,' *The Washington Post*, 30th May 2012.

Ansar al-Shari'a comprises far more 'participants' than hard-core members and both groups are reliant on marginal 'members' for supplies and logistics. Although its leadership still retains authority over strategic direction and is involved in organising and financing less frequent attacks against the far enemy in the mould of Abdulmutallab, far more attacks attributed to AQAP are organised outside the leadership circle.

The sum of both of these problems is that where drone strikes become an instrument of attrition rather than decapitation, identifying one's target becomes acutely difficult. It is virtually impossible to separate those individuals who merit targeting from those who do not. To return to the case of the civilians killed in al-Ma'ajalah, the deputy Prime Minister, Rashad al-Alimi suggested in a leaked US diplomatic cable that 'they were poor people selling food and supplies to the terrorists, but were nonetheless acting in collusion with the terrorists and benefitting financially from AQAP's presence in the area'.¹⁵¹ The question arises not only of whether al-Ma'ajalah was an appropriate target for a drone strike, but whether the benefits of drone strikes against fringe elements outweigh the costs. To phrase it in strategic terms, does the elimination of fringe elements weaken AQAP by reducing its means or strengthen it by increasing popular anger against the US and expanding the support base of the opposition? To date, it seems that the strategy has only strengthened support.

Negotiations, Coalitions and the Patronage System

Although the standard line of most governments states that they do not negotiate with terrorists, the Yemeni regime has resorted to this strategy on a number of occasions as a major strand of its broader counter-terrorism posture.¹⁵² In the case of Yemen, negotiation, which sits comfortably in a Yemeni patronage system that emphasises the advantages of coalition and co-optation, followed one of two tracks: the regime either sought to form a working coalition with oppositions by bringing them in to the arena of legitimate political participation or to arrange a lasting truce or 'tacit non-aggression pact'.¹⁵³ In both cases, the dynamics and mechanisms of the patronage system were at play: inducements and rewards were offered to limit the behaviour of an opposition and the threat of retribution deterred transgressive actions.¹⁵⁴ Where 'red lines' were crossed, retribution was tailored to the

¹⁵¹ 'US embassy cables: Yemen trumpets strikes on al-Qaida that were Americans' work'.

¹⁵² Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*.

¹⁵³ To use a phrase employed by Boucek, 'Yemen: Avoiding a Downward Spiral,' 13.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen'.

magnitude of the infringement, most serious of which was violent opposition.¹⁵⁵ In this sense, negotiation is a strategy of control: it can either be preventative (which is to say it removes the means available to a potential opposition before it becomes a significant threat) or it can be pre-emptive (in that it entails 'emergency' action against a growing threat).¹⁵⁶

The first negotiations with violent Islamists fall decidedly in to the 'pre-emptive' paradigm. In 1994 Saleh negotiated with the violent Islamist clusters that he had so keenly nurtured before and during the Civil War, well aware that they represented a large if disorganised force. Negotiations with Tariq al-Fadhli were facilitated by his own background and political ambitions. His family had been ousted by the Marxists along with the British in 1967 and he had spent much of his life in virtual exile. In the aftermath of the Civil War, al-Fadhli was offered a senior post in the General People's Congress, Saleh's own ruling party, and some of his lands were returned to him. This was not only a reward for his part in the Civil War, but also an incentive to align with the regime and to play by the rules of the game; the coalition between al-Fadhli and Saleh was successful and long-lived and it was only in 2009 that al-Fadhli broke with the coalition and joined with the southern movement, *al-Hirak*. Negotiations with Abu Hassan of the AAIA were less successful in the long-term. After the Civil War, the AAIA effectively entered into an unwritten truce with the regime. For four years, Yemen was relatively free of Islamist violence; the AAIA was unwilling to commit itself to mounting an attack on the regime, cognizant of the fact that they did not have the resources to present a serious challenge. By 1998, with global connections to prominent Islamists and increasing access to human and military resources, the AAIA broke the terms of the truce by planning an attack which was foiled in its early stages. The regime's response was uncompromising: they arrested all involved and, after the AAIA kidnapped a number of tourists, sent in troops to the AAIA's training camp in the al-Huttat mountains.

The regime's third attempt to negotiate with violent Islamist oppositions is perhaps the most interesting. According to a leaked diplomatic cable, in February 2009, President Saleh attempted to negotiate a truce with AQAP.

The Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) supposedly offered a truce to AQAP in early February ... [offering] to cease attacks on AQAP if the organization halted attacks against ROYG elements, yet

¹⁵⁵ Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen'.

¹⁵⁶ Freedman, 'Prevention, Not Preemption'.

no further contact occurred - suggesting AQAP did not accept the truce.¹⁵⁷

Unlike other strategies, negotiation is rarely an attempt to target the means of the opposition or to change their political ambitions. More frequently it is an attempt to bring about a change in the way that the opposition attempts to convert means to ends – it seeks to redirect strategy. In this case, Saleh sought to consolidate his own power rather than to limit his opposition. As the same cable noted, ‘it is highly likely Salih did indeed offer the truce, as recent information strongly suggests Salih's most pressing concern remains preserving his own power rather than eradicating Yemen's thriving extremist community’.¹⁵⁸ In the final analysis, however, violent Islamist organisations are deeply committed to their political goals; negotiations are likely to have a promising future only if the opposition judges a coalition or truce to be the best way of converting means to ends. In AQAP's analysis, the opposite was the case, as the cable noted:

AQAP's rejection of the cease-fire highlights the already permissive security environment; AQAP leadership is aware even should ROYG security forces continue their counterterror campaign, such actions are unlikely to significantly affect operational planning and/or execution. President Salih's consideration of the political oppositionist movement as the priority threat to his regime strongly suggests the ROYG will continue attempts to appease or even co-opt extremist elements while attempting to quell secessionist sentiment in the south. Following this strategy, Yemeni counterterrorism operations against AQAP will likely wane, and the extremist organization will have even more freedom to plot attacks in both Yemen and in neighboring Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁹

In a country thick with oppositions, the regime has long had to rely on coalitions and allegiances which it builds through its extensive patronage network.¹⁶⁰ In the case of Islamist

¹⁵⁷ Wikileaks: The Guantánamo Files, 'Diplomatic Security Daily,' (Department of State: Wikileaks, 2009). The cable suggests that the information was passed on by the *Mabahith* [Saudi Intelligence] but came originally from Mohammed al-Awfi, who turned himself into Saudi authorities shortly after his appearance in the merger video of January 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ The literature on Yemen's patronage system is extensive, but key articles include, see April Longley Alley, 'Yemen's Multiple Crises', *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 4 (2010); Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia*; Vincent Durac, 'The Joint Meeting Parties and the Politics of Opposition in Yemen', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2011); Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*; Schwedler, 'The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity.'; Stacey Yadav, 'Antecedents of the Revolution: Intersectoral Networks and Post-Partisanship in Yemen', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2011); April Longley Alley, 'Shifting Light in the Qamariyya: the Reinvention of Patronage Networks in Contemporary Yemen,' (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Georgetown University 2008); Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen'.

oppositions, co-optation into patronage networks is deployed as a method for maintaining control over parties whose objectives are often in conflict with those of the regime. Essentially, it is a method of crisis management under which, in the words of Sarah Phillips,

solutions to problems are created through the dispersal of resources, benefits, and status, and the way to attract these is, therefore, to create a crisis and then negotiate a solution with the leadership... In a patronage system, ideological concerns take a backseat to the more material considerations of resources, benefits and status upon which the system is maintained.¹⁶¹

Rather than limiting political ends, therefore, bargains with violent Islamist groups redirect the strategies used to achieve those ends (e.g. violence). By offering inducements and rewards for good behavior, the seductive promise of future rewards and benefits is intended to sweeten the bitter pill of co-operating with a rival and to ensure a certain level of loyalty to the regime. In return, the client

must also try to ensure the political quiescence of their constituency. In sum, they can take no action that either violently or non-violently threatens the highly personalized nature of power around Salih. This includes everything from organizing a coup to building formal institutions with the capacity to limit executive authority.¹⁶²

Equally, there are reprisals for bad behaviour when patronage clients transgress what April Longley Alley refers to as 'red lines'. 'Punishment', she notes, 'can be both individual and collective in nature. An individual may be punished directly or through the exclusion, harassment, or demotion of family members'.¹⁶³ Thus the logic of patronage and coalition forming is predicated on two parallel processes; on the one hand, there are political, reputational and economic inducements to initiate and maintain the coalition; on the other, the threat of exclusion and isolation from the patronage network is intended to coerce an opposition to remain within the alliance. In effect, coalitions survive or fail according to a strategic calculus: if the benefits (and costs) of political inclusion outweigh those of exclusion, as they did with non-violent Islamists in Yemen, then the coalition can function in the long-term. But it can also be a dangerous game: actors with different objectives can co-operate while it is expedient but the regime has little control over its rivals if their commitment to their own political agenda is very high. If the benefits of exclusion – the freedom to decide

¹⁶¹ Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism*: 5.

¹⁶² Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen', 399-400.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 403.

what one wants to do, when one wants to do it and how, without having to factor in the desires and aims of the benefactor – outweigh those of inclusion, then coalitions in Yemen are normally doomed to fail.

This strategic calculation was particularly finely balanced for terrorist groups in Yemen. As suggested throughout this research, the dominant logic of strategic violence is to maximize existing means. Non-violent Islamists remain non-violent because they calculate that they have sufficient means to complete their objectives or that non-violent political actions are the best way of maximizing their means. But for violent Islamists, it is precisely because their available means are so weak that alternative strategies of contention are adopted. With meagre means, the 'seductive capacity' of coalition – the advantage and allure of participating in legitimate politics – will always remain limited. To put it another way, if violent Islamists have already made the calculation that their means are too weak to warrant political inclusion, then the advantages of coalition with the regime (and the inducements offered) have to be extremely attractive to outweigh the perceived advantages of violence. Because their desire to accomplish objectives is abnormally high but their ability to achieve them is weak, coalitions between violent (as opposed to quietist) Islamists and the Yemeni regime have tended only ever to be a temporary fix before attractions of exclusion will exceed the advantages of alliance.

De-radicalisation

Another non-kinetic strategy deployed in Yemen is de-radicalisation. This broadly refers to the attempt to 'turn' members of the opposition whilst they are in the community or, as was the case in Yemen, in prison.¹⁶⁴ Strategically speaking, de-radicalisation challenges the ideology that underpins a violent opposition and in so doing, seeks to limit the means available to that opposition. By challenging the belief system on which political goals are predicated and through which violence is justified, de-radicalisation attempts to persuade members of the opposition to leave their ranks and join those of the strategist. As such, de-radicalisation intends to initiate a two-stage process: the first is to de-legitimise an opposition by undermining their ideology; the second is the broader attempt to de-mobilise an opposition by persuading its membership that the cause is unjust. This second stage can happen when defectors from the opposition reach a critical mass and the tension between means and ends becomes unresolvable. More commonly, however, it happens when

¹⁶⁴ See Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen*; Schwedler, 'The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity.'

particularly high profile leaders reassess their ideological position and persuade their former followers to do the same.

The emergence of Yemen's de-radicalisation strategy, the first of its type in the world, took place in late August 2002. After announcing the establishment of *Lajnat Hiwar al-Fikri* [Committee for Intellectual Debate], Saleh proceeded to meet with the *ulema* in September to sketch out a broad framework in which the committee would work. The initiative ran into problems from the outset: based on an interview with Supreme Court Justice Judge Hamoud al-Hitar (who would run the Committee), Boucek *et al* suggest that fourteen of the fifteen clerics assembled by the President were so reluctant to be involved that they opted out of the initiative.¹⁶⁵ Their major issue was 'physical safety' and they drew parallels with the assassination of Muhammad al-Dhahabi by *Takfir wal-Hijra* in 1977, which they saw as an act of retribution against a cleric attempting to mediate with the group. In the end, al-Hitar ran the Committee with the aid of just three clerics. The dominant premise of the Committee was 'if you are right we will follow you, but if what we are saying is right, you have to admit it and follow us'.¹⁶⁶ The first meeting with prisoners, at the Political Security Organisation Centre in mid-September 2002, highlighted some of the problems with mounting this type of ideological challenge. The incarcerated Islamists accused their interlocutors of being little more than 'regime flunkies' and illegitimate by virtue of the simple fact that they disagreed with Islamist ideology and the politics of violence.

The initial dialogue sessions consisted largely of the prisoners presenting a grievance grounded in theology and a counter-challenge by al-Hitar. The first claim was that the regime was un-Islamic by virtue of its pro-Western stance (best encapsulated by their own imprisonment), to which the Judge responded by providing a copy of the Constitution and penal code for the prisoners with the challenge that if they could find anything in contravention of *shari'a* then the laws would be changed.¹⁶⁷ Another challenge was that President Saleh was an illegitimate leader because he did not govern as a *caliph*. al-Hitar's counter-challenge was to ask the prisoners to show him where in the Qu'ran such a requirement is presented; again they could not. As the programme progressed and seemed to be meeting with some success, the question arose of what to do with those that relinquished their views. At the beginning, there was talk of amnesty for those who signed declarations stating their rejection of violence but it was decided that those who had been primarily

¹⁶⁵ Boucek, Beg, and Horgan, 'Opening up the *Jihadi* Debate: Yemen's Committee for Dialogue,' 185.

¹⁶⁶ Eric Westervelt, 'Growing Repression in Yemen May Feed al Qaeda,' *All Things Considered* (National Public Radio, 2005). I am grateful to the late Chris Boucek for this reference.

¹⁶⁷ Boucek, Beg, and Horgan, 'Opening up the *Jihadi* Debate: Yemen's Committee for Dialogue,' 187.

involved in lethal acts against others should be kept in prison for the duration of their sentences. Others, largely those that had been detained without charge, were released into society and sometimes provided with small amounts of money; release also required a commitment from family members and tribal figures to keep a watchful eye on former prisoners and to inform the authorities of any signs of recidivism.¹⁶⁸ In total, 364 detainees entered into the dialogue process of which, it was estimated, 40% of interventions were successful and saw a release into society.

Although the work of the Committee was greeted with enthusiasm in Yemen and beyond while it was in its infancy, over time doubts began to emerge over its effectiveness and after two former participants in the programme were identified as responsible for a suicide bombing on US forces in Baghdad, the programme was terminated after only three years in the running.¹⁶⁹ The academic and policy community is broadly split over whether the programme was effective. For some analysts, it was overtly a failure because AQAP re-emerged and re-engaged in terrorism from 2006 onwards.¹⁷⁰ Others have pointed to the initiative's flawed methodology, arguing that there were power imbalances between interlocutors and participants which simply did not permit a genuine dialogue, particularly where they thought that signing a declaration not to undertake violence could be interpreted as a confession of having not abided by these principles in the past.¹⁷¹ Equally, the fact that the programme provided an all-too-easy route for release has meant that the initiative is widely interpreted as a piece of political theatre rather than a genuine attempt to restructure or realign the political views of violent Islamists.¹⁷² Abu Jandal, bin Laden's former bodyguard, would later say that the Committee was little more than a political performance 'geared toward securing the detainees' acquiescence on several key points, including recognizing the legitimacy of the Yemeni government and obtaining assurance from program participants that they would not engage in violence within Yemen'.¹⁷³ As Abu Jandal phrased it, 'we understood what the judge wanted and he understood what we wanted from him. The Yemeni Mujahideen in prison know Hitar is the way for them to get released, so they ingratiate themselves with him... There was no long or complex dialogue'.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 189. See also Kevin Peraino, 'The Reeducation of Abu Jandal,' (2009).

¹⁶⁹ Gregory Johnsen, 'Yemen's Passive Role in the War on Terrorism', *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 4 (2006).

¹⁷⁰ Angel Rabasa et al., 'Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,' *RAND Corporation Monograph Series* (RAND, 2010).

¹⁷¹ Ane Skov Birk, 'Incredible Dialogues: Religious Dialogue as a Means of Counter-Terrorism in Yemen,' *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence* (London: ICSR, 2009), 14.

¹⁷² Fink and Hearne, 'Beyond Terrorism'.

¹⁷³ Blomberg, Hess, and Weerapana, 'Economic Conditions and Terrorism', 53.

¹⁷⁴ Tim Whewell, 'Yemeni anti-terror scheme in doubt,' *Crossing Continents* (BBC, 2005).

Others have pointed to the potential success of the Committee, arguing that its goal was never to bring about the de-radicalisation of all incarcerated Islamists but to 'facilitate the detainees' release and re-integration into society'.¹⁷⁵ Boucek *et al*, for example, suggest that the goals of the programme were to secure the recognition of the legitimacy of the Yemeni regime and the cessation of violence against Yemeni or western targets in Yemen and that by these lights, 'the dialogue committee has achieved relative successes'.¹⁷⁶ They respond to criticism that, for example, considerable numbers of Yemenis were present on other *jihadi* fronts, Iraq chief amongst them, by pointing out that detainees signed oaths stating that they would abstain from violence in Yemen, not beyond it.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, as al-Hitar himself said, 'Iraq wasn't part of the dialogue... I'm not responsible for Iraq. Nobody said to make a dialogue about that'.¹⁷⁸

Whatever the potential success or failure of the strategy, it is clear that de-radicalisation was, essentially, a way of targeting a key weakness in violent Islamist oppositions: their means. The strategy sought to re-appropriate members from al-Qa'ida's ranks and in so doing de-legitimise the opposition's ideological underpinnings. When these initiatives are successful, this process of 're-appropriation and de-legitimation' can de-mobilise an opposition by extending the gap between an opponent's resources and the political ambitions they are pursuing through violence. From a strategic point of view, then, de-radicalisation is decidedly a means-limiting script which seeks to prevent violence by making the tension between resources and goals unresolvable. In the case of Yemen, while the programme was in operation, it seems to have been at least partially responsible for the decline and eventual demise of al-Qa'ida. Although al-Qa'ida has re-emerged in Yemen, the de-radicalisation programme has not been restarted, although there were indications from the regime in 2010 that it intended to do so.¹⁷⁹ In the meantime, Yemen's violent Islamists have capitalised on the growing fragility of a financially weak, socially discontented and politically unstable country.

¹⁷⁵ Birk, 'Incredible Dialogues: Religious Dialogue as a Means of Counter-Terrorism in Yemen,' 4.

¹⁷⁶ Boucek, Beg, and Horgan, 'Opening up the *Jihadi* Debate: Yemen's Committee for Dialogue,' 189.

¹⁷⁷ The presence (or lack of it) of Yemenis in Iraq has been a topic of debate in studies of de-radicalisation. For differing perspectives, see Rabasa et al., 'Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists'; Boucek, Beg, and Horgan, 'Opening up the *Jihadi* Debate: Yemen's Committee for Dialogue.'

¹⁷⁸ Rabasa et al., 'Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,' 53. Whewell, 'Yemeni anti-terror scheme in doubt.' Indeed, Hamoud al-Hitar has been on record as saying that 'resistance in Iraq is legitimate, but we cannot differentiate between terrorism and resistance in Iraq's case because things are not clear'.

¹⁷⁹ Rabasa et al., 'Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists,' 85.

Conclusion: The Strategic Gap and the Circle of Hate

This chapter has examined the emergence of violent Islamism in two broad phases of scripts: co-operation, survival and attrition in the first, and attrition and mobilisation in the second. In the first, which ran from the early 1990s until 2005, violent Islamist groups began by forming multiple alliances and coalitions in an effort to increase their means and avoid regime reprisals. The rise of violent Islamists in this period was predicated on their adoption of the 'co-operation' script; in this they were spurred on by bin Laden's financial support and ideological vision, as well as by coalitions formed between the Yemeni regime and violent Islamist 'clusters'. After the Civil War, violent Islamists essentially pursued the 'flight' strand of the survival script, attempting to avoid government intervention by withdrawing into society; meanwhile, al-Nashiri raised the stakes by pursuing his own attritional script against the 'far' enemy. The attacks on the USS Sullivans and USS Cole, however, brought about little other than the increased attention and concern of the US who moved to destroy al-Qa'ida's presence in the country. As Yemen became a less permissive operating theatre and bin Laden became increasingly hostile towards Saudi Arabia and the US, violent Islamism began to decline.

Between 1990 and 2005, a three-part script was essentially pursued against violent Islamists. The first was 'annihilation' which sought to crush violent Islamist groups with military action and, later, through repression. This script targeted violent Islamist oppositions and their weak resources by killing large portions of an organisation or by incarcerating large numbers of Islamists, both violent and non-violent. The second script was 'de-capitation' by arrest and by drone strike which can be seen as an attempt to limit means by eliminating high-value members of the opposition – leaders and specialists, in particular. This was quite effective against smaller groups such as al-Qa'ida's presence in Yemen in the early 2000s, not least because it was a smaller, hierarchical network whose success was heavily dependent on its three principal figures – Abu Ali al-Harithi, Fahd al-Quso and Jamal al-Badawi. As bin Laden moved his focus away from Yemen and the US joined with the regime to form a counter-terrorism partnership in the aftermath of 9/11, so the decapitation through capture and targeted killing was strategically sufficient to render the organisation a *coup de grâce* and other marginal elements of both movements were rounded up and enrolled into de-radicalisation programmes. The third script was 'pre-emption' via coalition-formation and de-radicalisation. Coalitions were deployed as a way of redirecting strategy; they afforded the regime a certain level of control over the behaviour of violent Islamists and, while they lasted, were a highly effective way of preventing the use of violence. De-radicalisation, by contrast,

was a way of targeting fringe elements and preventing them from being fully deployed or re-deployed against the regime by challenging al-Qa'ida's compelling narrative.

The second phase of violent Islamism from 2006 to the present, in which al-Qa'ida in Yemen and AQAP pursued the 'attrition and mobilisation' script, has not been so easy to stamp out. In part, this was because AQAP presented a very different type of movement which formulated its attritional script rather differently to its predecessors and, in so doing, garnered greater resources and popular support in an increasingly unstable Yemen. Although the strategic vision remained traditional – AQAP sought to erode its opposition's limited military and financial resources, as well as the regime's willingness to continue the fight – AQAP managed to solve the problem of targeting which had so perplexed its Saudi forebears. AQAP used their remarkably successful propaganda material to construct a compelling narrative which both legitimised violence and mobilised disaffected elements of Yemeni society against the regime. Essentially this material had two aspects: it disseminated a strategic vision (e.g. attrition) and provided the script with frames built on ideology and grievances (e.g. by attacking the oil industry, the US will crumble and our brothers in Afghanistan will be saved). AQAP also demonstrated a penchant for, and expertise in, the adaptation of scripts. As the flow of foreign fighters dried up through interception by foreign governments, so AQAP shifted the format of its mobilisation; rather than solely seeking to mobilise new recruits in Yemen, it attempted to escalate its 'strategy of a thousand cuts' script by inciting would-be militants to create their own *jihadi* enterprises abroad. Again, AQAP's propaganda material played a central role in this mobilisation script by disseminating their strategic vision and disseminating this vision in a compelling narrative.

In response to all this, a two-pronged script was essentially envisaged against AQAP in this stage: annihilation and decapitation. The annihilation strategy was conducted predominantly through repression and military action on the part of the Yemeni regime against their violent Islamists and sought to remove the majority of resources available to the organisation in order to force AQAP into submission. As has been suggested, repression was not conducted to the same extent as it was in Egypt; in large part this is a consequence of the limited authority and resources of the regime. The US also became involved in Yemen, and sought to challenge violent Islamists through drone strikes. This 'decapitation' strategy attempted to deprive AQAP of its leadership was an effort to leave the middle and lower ranks bereft of strategic guidance and vision.

With the exception of the 'de-radicalisation' script, then, the response of those challenging violent Islamists in Yemen was very similar in both phases. And yet, whilst it was effective in the first phase of violent Islamism, it has not been in the second, at least judging by the fact that AQAP and *Ansar al-Shari'a*, its semi-autonomous cousin, both continue to grow. This, as the preceding argument has proposed, is the consequence of subtle shifts in the strategic logic of both parties which are obscured by examination of the strategies in isolation. The first of these was in the US campaign of drone strikes which has shifted from attempting to decapitate AQAP by removing its leaders to a script of attrition – that is, the removal of both central and marginal elements of the organisation. This, in turn, has meant that the US has fallen into the 'de-legitimisation trap': extensive drone strikes have not only failed to hit their targets, but also caused significant loss of civilian life, reducing popular support for the US, whilst simultaneously increasing the popularity of AQAP. The Yemeni regime's script has also shifted towards attrition; in the first phase of violent Islamism, their primary response was to repress or to co-operate (with the emphasis on the latter). As AQAP emerged in the wake of the prison break, the regime sought to annihilate the organisation through repression. In this phase, however, violent Islamists had greater resources at their disposal, because they couched their internationalist goals in the language of local grievance. As was suggested in Chapter 1, when annihilation scripts fail they shift to scripts of attrition, often disempowering the regime in the process. In Yemen, this process of de-legitimisation was further exacerbated by the regime's lack of popular support, most demonstrably exhibited in the protests of the Arab revolution.

In this sense then, the strategic gap – the disparity between vision and action – is wider in those scripts implemented against AQAP than those implemented by AQAP. The Yemeni regime, in partnership with the US, envisaged a dual script of 'annihilate and decapitate' but has in reality pursued a single-stranded script of attrition. As such, both have become suckered into an attritional war in which AQAP, the smaller, more agile opponent which can emerge rapidly to execute both terrorist and insurgent attacks on Yemeni territory and abroad before melting into a broad non-violent Islamist movement, has a distinct advantage. AQAP seems to have recognised the advantages of this attritional conflict, understanding that a long-term attritional war against a weak, newly established regime, in which it can mobilise further elements of a discontented population and legitimise its actions in terms of the grievances of that population, favours the underdog rather than the overlord.

Chapter 5

The Strategic Gap and Narrative Delusion: Of the Best-Laid Schemes and Scripts Gone Awry

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

-- Robert Burns¹

This thesis has attempted to formulate a model of terrorist strategic decision-making and to test that model on a range of violent Islamist groups in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Rather than viewing terrorism as a product of psychological traits or the congregation of specific political, economic and/or social factors, the research conceptualised terrorism as a reasoned strategic choice. This cleared the way for developing a decision-making model that incorporated theoretical material from a very broad range of academic fields: Middle East Studies, Linguistics, Social Psychology, Behavioural Economics, Evolutionary Biology and Social Movement Theory, not to mention the more traditional fields of Strategic Studies and Terrorism Studies. The purpose of this broad-based approach was to derive a genuinely interdisciplinary model of decision-making as a challenge to prevailing approaches in terrorism research – namely those root cause and exit theories which, despite fervent allegations of problem-solving and short-termism, continue to overshadow the field. At the same time, this research has sought to make a discernable contribution to the discipline by bringing decision-making, currently under-examined and out-dated, from the margins into the mainstream of Terrorism Studies.

Central to the interdisciplinary approach adopted in this research is the concept of strategic scripts. These, as suggested in Chapter 1, are structures which describe how a sequence of events is likely to unfold and which provide strategists with 'forecasts' about the way in which other players are likely to behave in a particular situation. It is this predictive quality which lends scripts such force in the decision-making process. Scripts come into play when a new situation emerges and they allow the strategist to interpret this situation, to envisage the outcomes of particular actions and to assess which strategic option is likely to achieve their

¹ Robert Burns, *Poems of Robert Burns Selected by Ian Rankin* (Penguin Classics, 2008). 40.

particular aims. According to this decision-making theory, which has been derived from recent work by social psychologists such as Daniel Kahneman, decisions begin in the subconscious: as a new situation arises, a script is activated, the situation understood and intuitive responses identified. This is referred to as System 1 decision-making. However, when situations are unfamiliar or when there is no appropriate script relating to a situation, decisions require conscious, 'effortful' deliberation: options must be weighed up against one another if a suitable and potentially effective course of action is to be pursued.²

Scripts govern the process by suggesting the way that others will react to particular actions and, more broadly, by identifying the likely outcome of a sequence of events. Much of this research has been devoted to examining the repertoire of scripts which govern violent Islamist strategic choices and, in the case study chapters, eight scripts were identified and examined in detail: survival (flight or fight), power play, provocation, de-legitimisation, mobilisation, attrition, co-operation, and de-mobilisation. One of the key findings was that violent Islamist organisations spent a great deal of time debating about (and, incidentally, disagreeing over) strategy to the extent that they often had surprisingly clear visions about how they expected their strategies to unfold. A second major finding was that, despite the clarity of these scripts, there was a pervasive disparity between strategic vision and strategic action which was termed the 'strategic gap'. Although violent Islamists had clear visions about the way their strategies should unfold, in practice these strategic visions rarely worked as intended.

This concluding chapter attempts to explore this 'strategic gap' in greater detail. It falls into two sections, the first of which will explore the repertoire of scripts identified in the case studies, briefly examining the way in which they were intended to work, identifying adaptations made by specific organisations and re-asserting the pervasive presence of the strategic gap. The second section asks why there is a disparity between strategic visions in theory and in practical application. It begins by arguing that scripts are particular types of compelling stories about the future: like stories they describe a situation, the way in which players interact in that situation and the sequence of events which occurs as a consequence of that interaction. And yet, because they are stories, scripts foster what this thesis terms 'narrative delusion'. That is, they provide accounts for handling situations successfully which are sufficiently compelling to drive collective action on the one hand, whilst simultaneously smothering their inherent limitations and flaws, on the other. The concluding section of the

² Freedman, *Strategy: A History*.

thesis examines the ways in which scripts have misled violent Islamists in the case studies, focusing in particular on various miscalculations and fallacies fostered by narrative delusion. Specifically, this section examines miscalculations over the availability of resources, the difficulties of accurately predicting the way in which a situation will unfold, the tendency to deploy scripts based on false analogies with other oppositional movements and, more broadly, the spurious cause-effect structures of scripts.

Scripts and the Strategic Gap

This thesis began by describing scripts as ‘inferential bundles’ which provide ‘rules for handling certain situations’; they were ‘mental theories’ which govern decision-making by making predictions about how a situation might develop, allowing options to be weighed up and a suitable course of action selected.³ Some scripts, particularly those relating to new or unique situations, required some thought and deliberation; others were instinctive, involuntary and essentially formulaic responses to situations. The most widely pursued, and in some senses, most important script in the case studies was decidedly in the latter category. This ‘survival’ script was a knee-jerk response, activated when organisations recognised themselves to be under particular threat from an enemy; in these circumstances, they promptly dispensed with long-term goals in pursuit, by whatever means necessary, of the shorter-term goal of their own continued existence. This instinctive survival reaction mirrors the ‘fight-or-flight’ behaviour displayed by organisms under threat and, as such, can be seen as an inherited biological response to danger. The ‘fight-or-flight’ response was first described in the work of Walter Bradford Cannon, a leading physiologist in the first half of the 20th Century whose study of adrenaline release in animals led to the coinage of the term. Cannon argued that this response was designed to make

the organism more efficient in the struggle which fear or rage or pain may involve.... The organism which with the aid of increased adrenal secretion can best muster its energies, can best call forth sugar to supply the laboring muscles, can best lessen fatigue, and can best send blood to the parts essential in the run or the fight for life, is most likely to survive.⁴

³ Abelson, ‘Psychological Status of the Script Concept’, 717.

⁴ Walter Bradford Cannon, ‘The Emergency Function of the Adrenal Medulla in Pain and the Major Emotions’, *American Journal of Physiology* 33, no. 2 (1914): 372. See also: Walter Bradford Cannon, *Bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear and rage: an account of recent researches into the function of emotional excitement* (New York: Appleton, 1915). In an effort to distinguish between the physical reaction to a threat in which catecholamines are released and an organisational knee-jerk response which emulates this process, I refer to the former as fight-or-flight and the script as ‘fight or flight’.

Much the same could be said of violent Islamists whose instinctive, System 1 reaction to the threat of elimination was to dispense with long-term ambitions and focus all their energy, resources and concentration on the short-term objective of survival. The more rapidly that resources were channelled into the survival script, the better chance of weathering regime reprisals.

Nevertheless, those who fought, however ferociously, tended to perish swiftly. As they were increasingly threatened by the regime, both the Secret Apparatus and the 1965 Organisation, for instance, sought to ward off the regime by resorting to violent self-defence. In practice, as they discovered, this succeeded only in initiating what Fanon, in the quotation which prefaces this dissertation, described as the 'circle of hate' and causing significant casualties which could be weathered by the regime but not by their own embryonic movements.⁵ Other groups, by contrast, sought not to fight to the death but to channel all their resources into fleeing from the opposition. Egyptian groups such as *Takfir wal-Hijra* and the Military Academy Group, for example, avoided regime repression by withdrawing into the mountains or hiding in plain sight respectively. By adopting this script, they were able to take advantage of the lull in hostilities to gather means and to recruit, although this inevitably resulted in difficult questions over when to dispense with 'survival' and pursue more ends-oriented scripts.

Part of the problem with the survival script, however, was that violent Islamist resources were too weak to force the regime to back away and too meagre to withstand the inevitable storm of reprisals if they were caught. Violent Islamists, as we saw in the Egypt case study, began to recognise this problem and realised that they had to transition between the 'state of weakness' and the 'phase of power' before they could successfully confront the regime. One means-focused script which was deployed in an effort to transition was 'co-operation' and, once again, it fell into two strands: alliances and coalitions. Violent Islamist alliances consisted of a union between organisations whose goals were analogous, but who differed on other matters – tactics, strategy, ideology and political vision, for instance. These alliances ranged from tenuous co-operation (between bin Laden and Tariq al-Fadhli's cluster, for example, which was essentially a financial arrangement) to what amounted to formal unions between organisations (AQAP and *Ansar al-Shari'a*, for instance). Because violent Islamist goals were not only clearly defined but also held by all players, at least in a fundamental sense, alliances were relatively long-lasting and allowed players to increase pressure on their oppositions by

⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [Les Damnés de la Terre]: 89.

pooling resources. The alliance between AQAP and *Ansar al-Shari'a*, for example, continues to thrive without any outward signs of disintegration as does the larger alliance which resulted in the formation of al-Qa'ida. Indeed, in the case studies, the only alliance which failed was the one between Farag and al-Zuhdi which formed *Tanzim al-Jihad*. Although their alliance was based on the logic of increasing meagre resources, the difficulty was that neither party could agree over the best way to deploy their increased means in the pursuit of political ends – that is, over strategy. The debate led to dissent between the Cairenes and Sa'idis, the disintegration of the alliance and, ultimately, to long-term animosity between the two groupings.

If, with the exception of the *Tanzim al-Jihad*, alliances were generally long-lasting and robust, then coalitions between violent Islamists and their regimes were transient, ephemeral and constantly on the precipice of dissolution. For violent Islamists, the strategic logic of coalitions was about garnering means: it was a way of putting the confrontation with the regime on hold while they devoted their energy to recruitment or turned their attention to a different, less contentious, opposition. For regimes, benefits came in the form of control: the coalition allowed them to limit Islamist violence or re-direct it towards another target. The problem with coalitions, in the case studies at any rate, was that violent Islamists calculated that they needed to pursue their own political ambitions if they were to keep the allegiance and interest of their members; at some stage, they inevitably broke the coalition as they pursued new, more violent, scripts against the regime. By breaking the coalition, violent Islamists transgressed established 'red lines' and, in so doing, inevitably stung their partners into punitive reprisals. In this sense, coalitions failed because violent Islamists failed to follow one of the four cardinal rules for successful co-operation identified by Robert Axelrod in his study of co-operation and the Prisoner's Dilemma. Here, he argued that 'the single best predictor' for the continued success of a co-operative relationship was whether or not a partner was the first to defect.⁶ The difficulty for violent Islamists, particularly in Yemen, was that they always *were* the first to defect and the regime invariably reacted by dissolving the coalition on the one hand and with reprisals, normally fatal to violent Islamists, on the other.⁷

⁶ For Axelrod, an defection does not have to be permanent or signal an end to a co-operative relationship. A defection may entail a single transgression of the terms which underpin a co-operative relationship which is likely to incur only relatively minor or temporary reprisals. Only repeated acts of transgression, or single but very significant ones, are likely to bring an end to co-operation. See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Co-operation* (Penguin, 1990). passim; esp 109-23; Robert Axelrod and William D. Hamilton, 'The Evolution of Cooperation', *Science* 211, no. 4489 (1981).

⁷ The Yemeni regime, it is worth noting, followed all four of Axelrod's rules: 'Don't be envious, don't be the first to defect, reciprocate both cooperation and defection and don't be too clever'. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Co-operation*: 110.

A third means-focused script which was implemented, albeit to a lesser extent than survival and co-operation, was 'power play'. The script took two forms: in the first, violence was deployed in the face of organisational fracture to cement a leader's authority over dissenting factions and to reunite the organisation under that leader's control. For instance, al-Zawahiri ordered a suicide bombing in 1993 in an effort to rectify the damage to his reputation and to repair the organisational split in the EIJ over the appropriate targets of violence. Equally, Hasan al-Banna sought to repair the splits that emerged in the Brotherhood over the nature and need for violence by activating the Secret Apparatus. On the second and broader level, however, violence was used to improve an organisation's status in the eyes of supporters, both real and potential, when it had been outdone by a more active, ferocious or high-profile rival. This was surprisingly uncommon in the case studies: Shukri Mustafa ordered the kidnapping and subsequent execution of Muhammad al-Dhahabi in the face of a media smear campaign and the defection of several of his members to the Military Academy Group; equally, at least part of the logic of al-Zawahiri's campaign of violence in Egypt in 1993 was geared towards 'outbidding' the EIG.⁸ Nevertheless, aside from these examples, there was a conspicuous lack of rivalry and one-upmanship between violent Islamists operating in the countries under study. There was, for example, no apparent use of the 'power play' script by either al-Uyayri or al-Nashiri, despite the fact that the two were at loggerheads over their respective strategic vision; equally, there was no particular sense of animosity between AQAP and *Ansar al-Sharia*, nor between the Saudi and Yemeni contingents which formed AQAP. It seems possible, bearing this in mind, to conclude tentatively that violent Islamists recognised that their means were meagre and rather than squandering these limited resources in an effort to eclipse rivals through displays of violent prowess, they preferred to 'co-operate' in order to accrue greater leverage.

Another script that was surprisingly less in evidence, given its repeated implementation by other terrorist organisations from *Narodnaya Volya* to the FLN, was 'provocation'.⁹ Both bin Laden and al-Uyayri envisaged the provocation script although only the latter managed to implement it in one of the case study countries. Nevertheless, the basic premise of provocation – that extreme violence will elicit a response from an opposition which is so over- or under-whelming that the population loses faith in the regime and begins to favour the terrorists – remains clear. In this sense, provocation, which aims to produce specific behaviours in several audiences, several moves in advance, is an indirect strategy that

⁸ This is the term used by Kydd and Walter, 'Outbidding and the Overproduction of Terrorism.'; Brym and Araj, 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing Revisited: A Critique of the Outbidding Thesis'; Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'.

⁹ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 118f.

attempts to pursue ends and gather means in equal measure. David Fromkin has usefully elucidated this point:

Terrorism is violence used in order to create fear; but it is aimed at creating fear in order that the fear, in turn, will lead somebody else – not the terrorist – to embark on some quite different program of action... a terrorist will shoot somebody even though it is a matter of complete indifference to him whether that person lives or dies. He would do so, for example, in order to provoke a brutal police repression that he believes will lead to political conditions propitious to revolutionary agitation and organization aimed at overthrowing the government.¹⁰

Although Fromkin goes too far in suggesting that provocation is the sole purpose of terrorist violence (an assertion at odds with the concept of scripts described in this thesis), his description chimes with the script identified in the research. The sole deployment of the provocation script was by al-Uyayri who had been strong-armed into implementing the script prematurely by bin Laden. It is difficult to judge whether it would have had greater success had it been implemented when ‘critical mass’ has been reached as al-Uyayri envisaged; as it was, bin Laden laid considerable pressure on al-Uyayri to dispense with his ‘survival’ script and ‘get on with his job of hitting the opposition’.¹¹ Nevertheless, al-Uyayri recognised that the problem with provocation was that the responses it was designed to elicit tended to be lethal and it was therefore a risky script which, without proper preparation, seriously threatened the organisation’s existence. Indeed, this was precisely why he advocated the ‘survival’ script in the first place: he sought to take advantage of the relative freedom to build up resources, recruit and train his personnel with a view to a final provocative confrontation with the regime which violent Islamists would be able to withstand. In practice, al-Uyayri’s provocation script did elicit the over-reaction he anticipated, but it failed to change the population’s perception of the regime, not least because the regime had gone to great lengths to ensure their legitimacy by implementing reforms which provided at least the veneer of liberalisation; rather, the backlash was so repressive that it led not only to the death of al-Uyayri but also to the dismantling of much of the organisation which struggled to survive in the months that followed.

¹⁰ David Fromkin, ‘The Strategy of Terrorism’, *Foreign Affairs* 53, no. 4 (1975): 692-93.

¹¹ Interview with ‘Amy’, (Senior Analyst, Arabian Peninsula, International Crisis Group), Skype, 26th March 2012.

The fifth script deployed by the violent Islamist movements under study was 'de-legitimisation'.¹² By attacking an unpopular ally of the regime, so the logic ran, violence would force a government to make impossible decisions about whom to support. On the one hand, if the regime decided to support its ally by cracking down on the perpetrators (catching moderates in the crossfire) then it would be likely to lose legitimacy in the eyes of a population experiencing the negative effects of repression. On the other hand, the regime could simply ignore the violence, but this would force a wedge between the regime and valuable allies and impart legitimacy on the claims made by terrorist violence. In the Saudi case study, de-legitimisation was consistently configured as the second stage of the provocation script: the provocation element sought to provoke the US into putting extreme pressure on the regime to deal with its violent Islamist 'problem' or risk losing a valuable ally. This, in turn, was designed to force the regime to make impossible choices about whom to defend in which all options ended with the regime's de-legitimisation. In this sense, the de-legitimisation script was a way of harnessing the coercive force which the US was able to exert on the regime in an effort to force it to make decisions which would inevitably lose it popularity, power and legitimacy. The problem with the script was not that the provocation element did not work, but that it assumed that confronting violent Islamists would inevitably deprive the regime of legitimacy. As the research argued, the Saudi ruling family mitigated the potential loss of legitimacy by encasing their aggressive repression of violent Islamists in a legitimising frame of liberalisation and reform. On the one hand, this had the effect of producing a 'schizophrenic' response to violent Islamists who were confronted with repression and 'soft' de-radicalisation initiatives in equal measure; on the other, it shored up the regime's political base and deprived AQAP of the popular support they sought to acquire.

The sixth script identified in the case studies was mobilisation. In contrast to provocation which was less in evidence, this script was extremely prevalent. In its original format, the basic premise of mobilisation was that an act of violence which substantially changed the political landscape – through the assassination of a high-profile political figure, for example – had the capacity to persuade others of the weakness of the regime and to convince them to take up the cause. Farag envisaged the script in precisely these terms, arguing that the assassination of Sadat would liberate the Egyptian people and pave the way for an Islamic

¹² For some, this is merely a desirable by-product of terrorist violence (e.g. Kydd and Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism'.) others have referred to this as polarisation: Cronin, for example, argues that 'this strategy directs itself at the effects of terrorist attacks on the domestic politics of a state, driving regimes sharply to the right and ultimately forcing populations to choose between the terrorist cause and brutal state repression. The goal is to force divided populations further apart...'. (Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*: 119.)

revolution. This vision was inherited by the EIJ after Farag's execution, although the organisation never had the opportunity to pursue it because internal splits forced al-Zawahiri to deploy the 'power play' script. Similarly, it formed a second stage in bin Laden's and al-Uyayri's strategic visions for Saudi Arabia. The problem with mobilisation was not so much in implementing violence and changing the landscape – although this understandably presented difficulties – but in inciting a population to take up the cause. The assassination of Sadat, for example, which Farag believed would create the conditions required for a popular, Islamic insurrection, in practice failed to have any substantial impact on the population.

AQAP in its Yemeni incarnation adapted the script to suit its own purposes. In contrast to the EIJ and al-Uyayri, AQAP sought to mobilise others not through the language of violence *per se*, but through their written materials. In the beginning, this material was essentially passive, amounting to little more than a call to arms in the form of statements concerning their ideology and politico-religious vision. By mid-2010, however, this material had become less about passive recruitment and more about active incitement. This material rejected the idea of would-be militants travelling to Yemen and urged them to construct their own *jihadi* enterprises at home. It delineated a strategic vision – 'the strategy of a thousand cuts' – and urged its supporters to contribute to the cause by constructing their own grassroots *jihad*. This strategic vision was then enfolded in a motivational frame which intertwined local grievances with western interventionism in Yemen in order to provide a compelling rationale for participating in AQAP's de-centralised, grassroots *jihad*. In the short-term, this was successful: numerous individuals were motivated by this written material to take up the cause on AQAP's behalf. In the longer term, however, the grassroots campaign has been unsuccessful: western policy has not changed substantially, nor indeed, has an Islamic state been established in Yemen.

The seventh script, 'attrition', was the pinnacle that most violent Islamists sought to attain. They hoped to garner sufficient resources through other scripts to be able to confront the regime with repeated acts of violence which would erode the regime's military, financial and political resources. In this sense, these attritional scripts reflected the standard 'guerrilla' paradigm, usefully described by Freedman as

concentrating on imposing pain rather than winning battles; gaining time rather than moving to closure; targeting the enemy's domestic political base as much as his forward military capabilities; relying on his intolerance of casualties and his weaker stake in the resolution of the conflict; and playing on a reluctance to cause

civilian suffering, even if it restricts military options. In short, whereas stronger military powers have a natural preference for decisive battlefield victories, the weaker are more ready to draw the civilian sphere into the conflict, while avoiding open battle.¹³

Violent Islamists in the countries under study similarly sought to initiate a long-term, grinding campaign which avoided open confrontation with the regime. For al-Zuhdi and the EIG, attrition was a way of inflicting costs on the regime by targeting their financial resources in the tourist trade, their legitimacy in the eyes of the Coptic community and their political support in the wider population. Both al-Nashiri and al-Muqrin pursued a similar script in which multiple acts of violence would force the US to withdraw from Saudi Arabia and, thus, weaken the regime. AQAP, similarly, constructed an attritional insurgency against the Yemeni government in an effort to de-stabilise and overthrow the regime; simultaneously they incited a grassroots campaign which executed de-centralised terrorist attacks against the US in an attempt to force the US to leave the Arabian Peninsula.

The problem was that oppositions were unlikely to take multiple attacks on their forces and interests lightly. In the face of attrition, regimes responded ruthlessly: there were mass round-ups of Islamists, executions and assassinations of their figureheads and military operations against their strongholds. In this sense, the victor in the attrition script was the side which could best endure the inevitable casualties. As Edward Luttwak wrote 'there can be no victory in this style of war without overall material superiority, and there can be no cheap victories achieved by clever moves with few casualties and few resources expended'.¹⁴ However, because attrition required significant resources this forced violent Islamists to make a tricky calculation: were sufficient means available to outlast the enemy? The point is made by John Mearsheimer:

the attacker must believe that he has enough soldiers and equipment to compensate for his heavier losses, a point suggesting that success in a war of attrition largely depends on the size of the opposing forces. Allowing for the asymmetry in losses between offense and defense, the side with greater manpower and a larger material base will eventually prevail.¹⁵

Violent Islamists, however, did not have access to resources in abundance; not only were their means meagre in comparison to their political ambitions but in relation to their opposition. As

¹³ Lawrence Freedman, 'The Revolution in Strategic Affairs', *The Adelphi Papers* 38, no. 318 (1998): 41.

¹⁴ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, 2nd ed. (Harvard University Press, 2002). 114.

¹⁵ Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*: 34.

the attritional scripts were initiated, the disparity between violent Islamist resources and those of the regimes they sought to coerce became patently clear. The Egyptian regime was able to deploy several thousand troops, arrest many thousands of Islamists and to maintain the aura of legitimacy in the eyes of its population without significantly stretching its military and security capabilities. The Saudi regime had to tread a finer line, largely because its own position was more precarious, but succeeded in snuffing out the Islamist threat whilst securing its own legitimacy in the form of a liberalisation programme. The Yemeni regime, by contrast, has not succeeded in treading this fine line, in part because its resources are limited and in part because its political authority is so contested; here, the attrition script continues to thrive.

The final script identified in the case studies was de-mobilisation. This was an overt strategic choice made by violent Islamists when other scripts were deemed inappropriate or were perceived to have failed. As the Egypt case study demonstrated, the first stage of de-mobilisation involved re-evaluating the situation, recognising the flaws in previous strategic visions and identifying non-violent strategies as the most effective way to pursue political ends. The second stage was trickiest: here, the strategic evaluation had to be communicated to others, allies and enemies alike, in order to persuade them of the advantages of non-violence or, in the case of the latter, to convince them that the rejection of violence was genuine, rather than a ruse for some other purpose. The difficulty in persuading others of the need to de-mobilise was quite clear in the Luxor attack of 1997, in which elements of the EIG sent an authoritative, if brutal, message that violence was the only way to coerce the regime. Aside from this, however, both the EIG and EIJ were able to pursue the de-mobilisation script with some success, with the consequence that violence declined rapidly from 1997 onwards.

It is important to distinguish this script from disengagement, de-radicalisation and defeat. Clearly, some organisations rejected violence because they were defeated by the enemy's counter-terrorist operations which so deprived them of means that terrorism was no longer a viable option. Others rejected violence because they were convinced – by counter-propaganda, counter-extremism strategies or de-radicalisation initiatives – that their political ends were misguided or fallacious. But, between those who have not the resources for terrorism and those who have rejected the ambitious political goals for which terrorism was implemented, are those who pursue the same political ends through non-violent means. In this sense, defeat is a consequence of the debilitating loss of resources; disengagement and de-radicalisation are the product of shifting political priorities; de-mobilisation, by contrast, is a strategic shift for pursuing ambitions by other means. In practice, at least for the EIG and EIJ,

that strategic shift required persuasion and this took the form of constructing a compelling narrative which identified the problem (the un-Islamic state and western interference in Egypt), provided a solution (non-violent political activism) and motivated supporters by laying emphasis on the need for this action.¹⁶

As all this suggests, the story of violent Islamism in the countries under study was, from their perspective at any rate, one of frustration and disappointment – of scripts which were inadequate, strategies which failed, means which were naggingly insufficient and ends which could only be left unreached. The only strategies which attained short-term milestones – such as gaining resources or uniting the movement – were non-violent: ‘flight’, ‘alliance formation’, ‘power play’, and AQAP’s adaptation of the ‘mobilisation’ script. Other, more violent, strategies stung the enemy into ruthless reprisals (‘fight’ and ‘attrition’) or failed to produce some desired reaction in the population (‘de-legitimisation’ and ‘mobilisation’) or simply collapsed of their own accord (‘coalitions’). Even when different strategies were glued together, they were unsuccessful: the hybridisation of mobilisation and attrition by *Tanzim al-Jihad* and al-Muqrin simultaneously failed to incite popular revolutions and to coerce their respective regimes. ‘De-mobilisation’ was successful in terms of finding an alternative path that might lead to political ambitions, but it has not as yet attained those ambitions.

‘The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men’, wrote Robert Burns on uncovering a nest of mice with his plough share as an unforgiving Scottish winter loomed in 1785, promise much joy but often go awry, leaving little but grief and pain. His point was that one can plan furiously only for some unforeseen agent to plough up the whole carefully constructed scheme. Much the same could be said of scripts – at least if the experience of violent Islamists is anything to go by. Scripts promised much, but gave little; they offered tantalising images of hard battles won, oppressed populations liberated and coveted political goals reached, but in practice, they brought little but reprisals and repression. This disparity between the way in which violent Islamists envisaged situations developing and the way in which events unfolded in reality – the strategic gap – has been a central component of this research. As yet, however, little has been said about what causes this strategic gap, and it is this question that we turn to in the final section of this study.

¹⁶ Benford and Snow, ‘Framing processes and social movements’.

Thinking Through Stories and Narrative Delusion

He told his story, and made the many falsehoods of his tale seem like the truth, and as Penelope listened her tears flowed and her face melted as the snow melts on the lofty mountains, the snow which the East Wind thaws when the West Wind has strewn it, and as it melts the streams of the rivers flow full: so her fair cheeks melted as she wept and mourned for her husband, who even then was sitting by her side.

-- Homer *Odyssey* XIX.203f.

Odysseus, on meeting his wife Penelope for the first time in twenty years and having to keep his identity hidden, tells the story of his own demise. His story is so persuasive and masterful that Penelope, who for two decades has believed so fervently that Odysseus is alive and will return, fully believes him dead. This is the power of compelling stories: they can produce the strongest of emotions; they can make lies seem like the truth, and the truth like lies; they can change the most fervent of opinions and can galvanise humans into action. At several key moments in this research, we have touched upon the idea that scripts can be seen as compelling stories told about the future and it is important to expand on their narrative and persuasive aspects in order to explore the disparity between strategic vision and strategic action further. Structurally speaking, the internal configuration of scripts replicates those of narratives: in the Aristotelian sense, they have 'a beginning, a middle and an end'.¹⁷ Or to render scripts in terms reminiscent of structuralists, who see narratives constructed from multiple building-blocks, they are stories in the sense that they are 'made up of slots and requirements about what can fill those slots. The structure is an interconnected whole... what is in one slot affects what can be in another'.¹⁸ Scripts can also be seen as narratives because they provide accounts of how situations develop, of the way characters interact and the outcome of these interactions. Charles Tilly, for example, argues that a story consists of a

¹⁷ Rudolf Kassel, *Aristotelis de arte poetica liber*, repr. of 1966 ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). 1450b21 - 50b34; a translation can be found in Aristotle, 'Poetics,' in *Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). The text I have translated above is from 1450b26: ὅλον δέ ἐστιν τὸ ἔχον ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευτήν.

¹⁸ Schank and Abelson, 'Scripts, Plans, and Knowledge,' 151. On structuralist approaches to narrative in literary criticism, see Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Louis Wagner (University of Texas for the American Folklore Society, 1968); Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. R. Harris, 2nd ed. (Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1995); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (Schocken Books, 1995); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Penguin Books Ltd, 1986); Roland Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (1975); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Dr Annette Lavers (Vintage Classics, 2009); Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990). The best general introduction is Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London: Routledge, 2001). esp. Ch. 9.

limited number of characters with 'motives, capacities and resources', a set of objects with which to interact and a demarcated spatial and temporal environment; then 'set your characters in motion', 'make sure that all their actions follow your rules of plausibility' and 'trace the accumulated effects of their actions to some interesting outcome'.¹⁹

This narrative aspect to scripts is central to decision-making and cognition because, as Nassim Nicholas Taleb has argued, humans have a tendency to think through – and in terms of – stories. For Taleb, stories help humans to make sense of the world around them, to distil it into ready frameworks for interpretation and understanding: 'we like stories, we like to summarize, and we like to simplify', he notes, going on to say that humans have a 'predilection for compact stories over raw truths' because 'explanations bind facts together... they help them make more sense'.²⁰ Tilly similarly noted the human tendency to think in terms of narrative and to construct stories to explain sets of facts. Stories, he suggests,

... pop up everywhere. They lend themselves to vivid, compelling accounts of what has happened, what will happen or what should happen. They do essential work in social life, cementing people's commitments to common projects, helping people make sense of what is going on, channelling collective decisions and judgments, spurring people to action they would otherwise be reluctant to pursue.²¹

What troubled both Tilly and Taleb was that stories imply causality where it is weak or absent; they might be useful packages for data in terms of making sense of social processes, they argued, but their internal structures invariably mean the data which they convey become linked in terms of cause and effect.

These concerns apply to strategic scripts as well. Essentially, scripts are little more than sequences of events which might or might not be related. But the propensity of humans to view information in terms of stories means that bland sequences of events are often thrust into a cause-effect framework which not only renders them far more compelling and persuasive but also creates a series of logical flaws in scripts. This is what I refer to as narrative delusion.²² Narratives delude strategists because they tell compelling stories about

¹⁹ Tilly, 'The Trouble With Stories,' 257.

²⁰ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (Penguin, 2008). 64.

²¹ Tilly, 'The Trouble With Stories,' 258.

²² Others have referred to this as the narrative fallacy: Taleb, *The Black Swan*; Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*; Freedman, *Strategy: A History*; Lawrence Freedman and Jeffrey Michaels, eds., *Scripting Middle East Leaders: The Impact of Leadership Perceptions on U.S. and UK Foreign Policy* (London:

the future, offering alluring cause-effect structures as credible models for achieving ambitions; and yet, it is precisely because scripts are converted into narratives with causal structures that they encourage bad analogies, false assumptions, misinterpretations and fallacies. When it came to violent Islamist decision-making, scripts offered tantalising promises of ambitions achieved through causally-linked sequences of events and lulled strategists into pursuing them by fostering an ‘illusion of inevitability’.²³ When scripts were followed, however, the fact that they had spurious cause-effect structures was invariably revealed as sequences of events failed to materialise, as other parties decided not to play their parts appropriately or pursued some script of their own and as political ambitions were left out of reach.

An example usefully demonstrates the point. The ‘mobilisation’ script outlined in the previous section describes a chain of events which can be broken down into five component stages: violence | political change | weakened regime | popular revolution | further political change. The human tendency to recast sequences of events as stories means that it is virtually impossible *not to explain* these events by linking them in causal framework. This produces a little story: the assassination of a high-profile political figure substantially changes the political landscape by weakening the regime; this, in turn, appeals to a frustrated population who now recognise a regime’s fragility with the consequence that the population rises up against the remnants of the regime, who are unable to suppress the insurrection and are thus driven out of power, allowing the people to institute a new, more favourable government. In this sense, the script has not only become a potentially compelling and convincing story but one which implies that each stage is a necessary and immutable product of the previous stage. For a violent Islamist strategist on the cusp of making a major decision about a future strategy, the script was compelling because it provided a set of rules for overthrowing the regime: all one needed to do was to attack a high-profile member of the enemy at the right moment when the population was restless and – to shorten the cause-effect structure yet further – the people will rise up and the regime fall.

The difficulty was that the cause-effect structures through which scripts explained sequences of events, were, for violent Islamists anyway, fundamentally flawed. They allowed little room for the accidental and unpredictable, they obscured the role of luck and overstated the role of human agency, and most importantly, they oversimplified complex causal structures, making them linear and one-dimensional. Not surprisingly, when implemented, the chain of events

Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). I refer to it as narrative delusion in order to lend the phenomenon a more active role on strategists.

²³ Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 200.

they forecast failed to emerge leaving a substantial gap between strategic vision and strategic action. Why did violent Islamists not recognise these flaws and produce more malleable scripts? At least part of the answer is because they suffered from narrative delusion: scripts were so compelling – because they explained sequences of events through stories – and violent Islamists so eager to believe them – that they were blinded to the fallacies and assumptions in the cause-effect structures which characterised scripts.

Emulation and the Assumption of Transferability

Man is always a teller of tales. He lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them.

-- Jean-Paul Sartre²⁴

The flaws in cause-effect structures come into particularly sharp focus when strategists draw analogies with similar situations and ‘borrow’ scripts. This process is a central part of script formation and decision-making. Just as the novelist cannot write a book which is not, in some sense, influenced by other stories, so the strategist cannot formulate scripts blindly, without (at least, subconscious) reference to other situations and scripts. As Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in the quotation which prefaces this subsection, ‘man is always a teller of tales. He lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them’. Taleb puts the same point in more scientific terms, arguing that ‘it is literally impossible to ignore posterior information when solving a problem’. Strategists, like novelists, draw analogies with the scripts of other strategists, seeking to re-work their weaknesses and/or emulate their most successful elements in new situations.²⁵ This is not to say that strategists are simply closet plagiarists who steal other people’s scripts. But it is, however, to say that strategic scripts deployed by others act as a reference point for analogies and comparisons, whether positive or negative, in formulating scripts for the future.

Like most decision-makers, violent Islamist strategists drew numerous analogies with others, often seeking to replicate their successes by emulating them.²⁶ Abd al-Salam Farag, for

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* [La Nausée], trans. Robert Baldick (Penguin, 1965). 61.

²⁵ Similar points are made by Larson, ‘The Role of Belief Systems’; Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press, 1992); Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (Free Press, 1988).

²⁶ Indeed, in a broader sense, Cronin has noted that terrorist organisations ‘display a kind of contagion effect, designed with the lessons of predecessors or contemporaries very much in mind... group leaders often look beyond their own narrow and specific context. If we want to understand them and what they are trying to do, so should we’. Cronin, *Ending Terrorism: Lessons for Defeating al-Qaeda*: 25.

example, formulated his mobilisation script on the paradigm of the Iranian Revolution, but his search for a new script was predicated on an explicit critique of the stories of his predecessors in which he argued that trying to avoid the regime by fleeing to the desert was a 'waste of time' and that attempting to put an end to imperialism through violence was 'not a useful act'. Bin Laden, similarly, borrowed from other strategists; he thought he could force the US to retreat from Saudi Arabia based on stories about their withdrawals from Aden, Lebanon and Somalia; al-Uyayri, in turn, formulated his script based on bin Laden's strategic vision; Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin hybridised this script by combining the attrition and mobilisation elements of al-Uyayri's and al-Nashiri's strategic visions.

Violent Islamists who were lulled into emulating the compelling scripts of others suffered from narrative delusion: they remained blind to the crucial but fallacious assumption that the causal structures in the stories of others' successes could be 'transferred' to new environments. The case of Farag is particularly illuminating. He wanted to overthrow the regime in the same way as the Iranian Revolution had overthrown the Shah; therefore he needed to weaken the regime by assassinating Sadat and, in so doing, the Egyptian population, liberated from Sadat's authoritarianism, would recognise the regime's fragility and rise up against it, overthrowing the last remnants of the *jahili* government and establishing a truly Islamic state. Part of the problem was that the differences between Egypt and Iran outweighed the similarities. Sadat, although leading in a time of economic hardship and mild unpopularity, saw nothing on the scale of long-term general strikes and animosity experienced by the Shah in Tehran; Sadat had the full support of the US after Camp David whereas, after the election of Carter with his advocacy of human rights, the Shah's relationship with the US was no longer unconditional; equally, Farag, although he had a following in Egyptian Islamist circles, was far from the charismatic rhetorician of Khomeini who was able to 'unify the various components, religious and secular, of a movement whose single point of departure was hatred of the shah'.²⁷

The greater problem, however, was that Farag suffered from narrative delusion. Farag's script carried a set of events, broadly consonant with the Iranian model: violence | weakened regime | popular revolution | overthrow of the regime. The narrative aspect of the script, however, encased these components in a cause-effect framework which fostered the illusion that similar effects would stem from the same starting action in similar situations. So alluring was

On the 'contagion effect' see: Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', 382; Manus Midlarsky, Martha Crenshaw, and Fumihiko Yoshida, 'Why violence spreads', *International Studies Quarterly* 24 (1980).

²⁷ Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*: 110.

the cause-effect structure of the Iranian revolution script which he sought to re-deploy in Egypt that Farag overlooked the flaws of emulation. The crucial difficulty was that the causal structures of the Iranian Revolution could not simply be transferred to the Egyptian theatre and, as we saw, the assassination of Sadat did not de-stabilise the Egyptian regime, nor did it incite a revolution, but it did produce an uncompromising backlash. In this sense, the strategic gap was the product of narrative delusion. Because violent Islamist strategists, like all humans, had a propensity to structure sequences of events as stories, they inevitably provided them with cause-effect structures. But the problem was that these causal models were not necessarily transferrable. An action that produces a particular effect in one environment may produce a completely different effect in another setting – and, as Farag found out, that effect may be detrimental, even lethal, to the strategist's own side.

Stories and the Problem of Interpretation

Another consequence of narrative delusion was that strategists interpreted stories about the strategic successes (and failures) of others to suit their own purposes, distorting their causal structures, misconstruing crucial elements and even fabricating their outcomes. And yet, these 'recipes for success' were so compelling that strategists glossed over the flaws in their interpretations with the consequence that the scripts violent Islamists mimicked were fallacious. Bin Laden, for example, sought to coerce the US to withdraw from Saudi Arabia based on explicit references to Aden and Somalia. Bin Laden's analysis of Aden was clear: 'The United States wanted to set up a military base for US soldiers in Yemen so that it could send fresh troops to Somalia. The Arab *mujahideen* related to the Afghan *jihad* carried out two bomb explosions in Yemen to warn the United States, causing damage to some Americans staying in those hotels. The United States received our warning and gave up the idea of setting up its military bases in Yemen'.²⁸ For bin Laden, the US withdrawal from Aden provided evidence that 'provocation' worked; by causing rapid loss of American life through violence, he calculated, it was possible to produce a recalibration of their cost-benefits analysis of occupying Muslim territory and to coerce them into withdrawal. The analogy with Somalia was equally important to bin Laden's advocacy of the 'provocation' script. In his 1996 *'fatwa'*, he addressed US Secretary of Defense, William Perry, arguing that 'when tens of your solders were killed in minor battles and one American Pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you. Clinton appeared in front of the whole world threatening and promising revenge, but these threats

²⁸ Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America, Revised Edition*: 147.

were merely a preparation for your withdrawal'.²⁹ Bin Laden interpreted the Battle of Mogadishu as evidence for American aversion to losses and, in his eyes, their cowardice. He calculated that the US could similarly be coerced into withdrawing from Saudi Arabia by inflicting heavy casualties of military personnel, thus altering the US Government's perceptions of the advantages of their presence in Saudi Arabia.

The problem with bin Laden's analysis was not only that he assumed, like Farag, that the cause-effect structures in these analogous scripts could be re-deployed in the Saudi case, but that his *interpretation* of these cause-effect structures was flawed. In the case of Aden, he derived a script from a false story: the attacks did not actually kill any American soldiers and the subsequent 'withdrawal' of US forces was not a product of Islamist violence, but rather of operational requirements to enter the Somali theatre.³⁰ In the case of Somalia, the violence and loss of life in the Battle of Mogadishu did indeed bring about a departure of US troops; just four days after the gun battle in the streets of Mogadishu on 7 October 1993, Clinton announced that he would bring troops home in the next six months. The problem for bin Laden's analogy was that the events of Somalia had not been a 'provocation' script at all: as US forces attempted to capture two senior Somali National Alliance politicians, rumours spread throughout Mogadishu and Somali militants flocked to the scene. In contrast to the deliberative 'provocation' script in which violence forces an opposition to react and which bin Laden envisaged, the script actually implemented was a knee-jerk and instinctive reaction to US aggression broadly approximating the 'fight' strand of the survival script. For violent Islamists, the impact of bin Laden's misinterpretation of these (and other) stories was considerable; bin Laden's 'provocation' script generated unreasonable expectations about the way in which a sequence of events should unfold and invariably elicited uncompromising responses from regimes when it was implemented. A further issue was that bin Laden's 'provocation' script acquired a lengthy 'ancestry'; it would later be deployed by al-Uyayri and, eventually, as part of al-Muqrin's hybridised script; on a broader level, it would be pursued by the wider al-Qa'ida movement in attacks like 9/11 and 7/7. And yet, because the script was based on flawed assumptions which led to a spurious cause-effect structure, it did not – and has not – succeeded in achieving strategic milestones or al-Qa'ida's long-term objectives.

When strategists formulate strategic visions based on the stories of others, an act of interpretation is required; the story to which analogy is drawn must be distilled into a

²⁹ PBS News, 'Bin Laden's Fatwa Aug. 23, 1996'.

³⁰ Although the US would not use Aden as a base for Operation Restore Hope, but by the time of the attacks on the hotels there was little need to do so, as the US had established a working infrastructure in Mogadishu.

sequence of events and the causal relationship between those events must then be identified accurately. But constructing new scripts based on interpretations of the past is far from easy. As Daniel Kahneman argued, 'we believe we understand the past which implies that the future also should be knowable, but in fact we understand the past less than we believe we do'.³¹ The Aden and Mogadishu examples showed how easily interpretation of other stories can go awry. In the Aden case, bin Laden constructed a provocation script based on false perceptions about the outcome of a story; in the Mogadishu case, his perception of the outcomes was accurate, but his identification of the sequence of events and the causal relationship between those events – in other words, the script – which led to that outcome was false. The difficulty is that accurate interpretation of stories is far from easy; biases invariably creep in and when they do, the resulting script is likely to have a fundamentally flawed cause-effect structure which may promise much but when put into practice, will make little headway in achieving one's ends.

Simplifying the Causal Nexus

Violent Islamist scripts, as stories, suffered from an underlying problem, whether they were the product of analogies and emulation or not: they invariably simplified the cause-effect structure which connected the various stages in their scripts, overstating human agency, underplaying the role of luck and excluding all but a handful of characters. The case of Abdulmutallab, for example, was extolled as a great success by AQAP in its first edition of *Inspire*, claiming that

He managed to penetrate all devices, modern advanced technology and security checkpoints in the international airports bravely without fear of death and defying the great myth of the American and international intelligence, and exposing how fragile they are, bringing their nose to the ground, and making them regret all that they spent on security technology.

In reality, Abdulmutallab was lucky; his father had been so concerned that he reported him to the US, who added him to the Terrorism Identities Datamart Environment database, but after a 'number of human errors', he was not added to the Terrorist Screening Database, nor was his visa revoked.³² Another attack vigorously praised by AQAP was the attempted assassination of Prince Mohammed bin Nayef by Abdullah al-Asiri. Once again, luck played a

³¹ Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 201.

³² Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate, *Attempted Terrorist Attack on Northwest Airlines Flight 253: Unclassified Executive Summary of the Congressional Report* (US Government Printing Office, 2010). 2.

significant role, not least in the fact that the Prince agreed to the meeting, and, having agreed to it, in that al-Asiri was not searched by the Prince's security guards. An issue of *Sada al-Malahim*, however, claimed that

[al-Asiri] was able to enter [Nayef's] palace and circulate amongst his bodyguards, thereupon igniting his explosive device ... after he passed through all the checkpoints in Najran and Jeddah airports, and was transferred aboard the plane that belongs to [the Prince]."

This tendency to emphasise human agency in scripts and to omit the element of the unpredictable characterised most violent Islamist scripts. Bin Laden's provocation script, for example, was derived from stories about Aden and Mogadishu. In the case of Aden, there was very little human agency involved in coercing US forces to leave, not least because they left of their own accord. In the case of Mogadishu, the mass influx of Somali militiamen was essentially a random unpredictable event – a black swan, for academics like Taleb – rather than the product of human effort and yet, bin Laden re-told the story as one of violent Islamists forcing the US to withdraw. Equally, simplified causal structures permeated the stories violent Islamists told about the future: the *Tanzim al-Jihad*, for example, envisaged the assassination of Sadat by violent Islamists as a way inciting a mass insurrection; al-Nashiri envisaged an attritional war in which violent Islamists inflicted heavy casualties which coerced the US into leaving the Arabian Peninsula; the Secret Apparatus imagined that Islamist violence would ward off regime oppression.

In relating these stories, violent Islamists constructed compelling narratives by lacing a causal thread through a sequence of events, pedestalling human agency and smothering the role of luck and the unpredictable. The difficulty with these stories was that cause could not be so easily linked to effect. In reality, successfully coercing enemies through meagre means required a whole range of factors to be present – economic hardship, a restless population, lack of international support for the regime, timing, luck, popularity for Islamist ideals and so on. Scripts, as stories, drastically simplified this causal nexus, linking Islamist violence to specific reactions of multiple players many moves in advance. They implied that ambitious ends could be achieved with even minimal resources through specific violent Islamist actions. The problem for violent Islamists, of course, was that they were deluded by the compelling narratives of scripts as stories. These stories were so alluring – and violent Islamists, committed to their political ambitions, so willing to be convinced – that their inherent flaws were glossed over, ignored or dismissed. This is a standard aspect of stories – as Kahneman has argued, compelling stories are 'simple; are concrete rather than abstract; assign a larger

role to talent, stupidity and intentions than to luck; and focus on the few striking events that happened rather than on the countless events that failed to happen'.³³

Narrative Delusion

It is tough to make predictions. Especially about the future.

-- Yogi Berra

This section started by stripping the mobilisation script of its narrative, paring it down to the bare bones of the information it carried – a sequence of events – before proceeding to reconstruct the script as a 'little story'. In the following subsections, we saw how violent Islamist decision-makers used analogies in this process by borrowing specific sequences of events and cause-effect structures from others and applying these structures to their own situation to make (rather inaccurate) stories about the future. We also saw that these analogies were often based on flawed assumptions over the transferability of causal structures between different situations on the one hand, and over the interpretation of analogous scripts on the other hand. These assumptions were the product of bad strategy and, theoretically, could be ironed out by better strategists, or at least by better interpreters of stories. But violent Islamist scripts, whether the product of emulation or not, also suffered from the more fundamental and pervasive problem of shortening the gap between cause and effect. They invariably exaggerated the role of human agency, smothered the role of luck and simplified the complex nexus of causes required to achieve their political goals.

Perhaps, as Taleb and Freedman have argued in different contexts, violent Islamists would have had more success had they told better stories about the future, ones which allowed for the unpredictable and which understood a broader range of causes in producing effect.³⁴ In practice, however, violent Islamists did not just tell crudely constructed stories, they told *extremely* simple stories about the future which distilled situations to a handful of causes leading directly, immutably and inevitably to a single desired effect. This, I argued, was a product of narrative delusion: because simple stories were compelling, violent Islamist strategists overlooked their inherent flaws. The simpler the story, the more compelling – and fallacious – it was, and the more violent Islamists glossed over the flaws. Kahneman similarly noted that 'when there are fewer pieces to fit into the puzzle... [o]ur comforting conviction that the world makes sense rests on a secure foundation: our almost unlimited ability to

³³ Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 199.

³⁴ Taleb, *The Black Swan*; Freedman, *Strategy: A History*.

ignore our ignorance'.³⁵ The narrative delusion revolved around this point. Simple stories were compelling; they had the capacity to drive collective Islamist action; they described a series of simple, causally-linked events which led to desired goals; they made promises about the future; and, when it came to making decisions about the future, it is little wonder that particular scripts, offering tantalising images of political goals easily achieved, appealed to violent Islamists. And yet, violent Islamists rarely questioned the simplicity of these strategic visions nor the crucial factors that these stories omitted because compelling narratives deluded violent Islamists into 'ignoring their own ignorance'.

To expand this beyond the world of violent Islamism, the theoretical propositions formulated in this research – of scripts, systems, the strategic gap, stories and narrative delusion – could be fruitfully applied to strategists and decision-makers outside the world of violent Islamism. From the perspective of terrorism research, this might involve examining other terrorist organisations in an effort to examine what type of stories they tell about the future and how these stories provide sequences of events with causal structures and which fallacies pervade these structures. It might, more broadly, examine the stories that terrorists tell about terrorism in an effort to reveal the myths and fallacies which pervade the cause-effect structures in that story. Indeed, there is no reason not to apply this theoretical framework to non-terrorist strategists, identifying their specific scripts, examining the disparity between vision and reality and exploring narrative delusion and the range of fallacies it fosters.

Indeed, it is precisely because all strategists tell stories about the future – and because all stories have cause-effect structures which offer tantalising images of goals achieved – that all strategists must, to some extent, suffer from narrative delusion. Nevertheless, there seems to be little choice for strategists other than to make stories out of sequences of events in order to make scripts which are useful and predictive. Without stories and their cause-effect structures, the outcomes of actions cannot be envisaged and decisions can only be made blindly in the vague hope that something advantageous might arise. Strategists are therefore engaged permanently in writing stories about the future based on their interpretation of stories about the past. From this perspective, good decisions and good strategy are a product of good story-telling about the future and good interpretation of past stories. By the same token, bad decisions and bad strategy, that is strategy unlikely to produce desired effects, are similarly the product of bad interpretation of past stories and bad story-telling about the future. If one is to convert means into ends, one must produce stories whose cause-effect

³⁵ Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: 201.

structures are reasonable, whose assumptions are accurate and whose plots do not exclude crucial environmental factors such as the role of the unpredictable. The difficulty for strategists, and especially violent Islamist strategists for whom there is no room for mistakes, is that they must make extremely accurate predictions. As the eminently wise Yogi Berra noted, 'it is tough to make predictions. Especially about the future'. Strategists might well agree.

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Bibliography

The research has benefitted from many discussions with journalists and experts as well as conversations with several individuals who were happy to talk to me, if not to have a engage in a formal interview process. These 'coffee meetings', as one such individual called them, have enlightened this research beyond measure. The list of interviews below were more formal affairs, based around the semi-structured format outlined in the methodology, rather than free-flowing informal conversations. As discussed in the methodology section, not all of these interviews were on the record, but I sought permission from interviewees to use quotations where appropriate. It was reassuring that the informal conversations and off-the-record interviews essentially supported much of the information which arose from the on-the-record interviews. A second major source of material was the publications of the violent Islamist groups under study. Ascertaining the accuracy of this material is difficult, though many of my interviews suggested that, at least in the realm of strategy, they were accurate. I have attempted to provide as exhaustive a list of primary sources as possible. Not all these sources have been referenced in the research, for reasons of space and to avoid monotony, but almost all sources have been influential in understanding the scripts under investigation.

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Interview with 'Abu Hadhram' (senior Yemeni political adviser), London, 12th April 2012.

Interview with 'Albert' (former Senior Foreign and Commonwealth Official in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), London, 8th December, 2011 and 24th April 2012.

Interview with 'Amy', (Senior Analyst, Arabian Peninsula, International Crisis Group), Skype, 26th March 2012.

Interview with 'Bob' (former British Intelligence official with specialty in the Gulf), Skype, 4th May 2012.

Interview with 'Brian' (British Intelligence Officer with Saudi specialty), London, 14th January 2011, and by telephone 23rd July 2011 and 23rd February 2012.

Interview with 'Chris' (Yemen and Saudi Arabia analyst at US think tank), London 1st November 2010.

Interview with 'David', (journalist and al-Qa'ida analyst) email, 5th February 2011.

Interview with Egyptian security official, Cairo, 15th May 2011.

Interview with former British diplomat in Egypt, Cambridge, 7th May 2012.

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Interview with 'Hamdi', (former academic, pollster and analyst at Brookings), Cairo, May 17th 2011, 27th February (telephone) and London, 21st March 2012.

Interview with 'Ibrahim', (Egyptian Academic), Cairo, 11th February 2012.

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